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**A
CHRISTMAS
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GREAT ILLUSTRATED CLASSICS

A CHRISTMAS CAROL

Charles Dickens

CHRISTMAS BEDTIME STORIES

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STORIES FROM THE BIBLE

Old and New Testament

GREAT ILLUSTRATED CLASSICS

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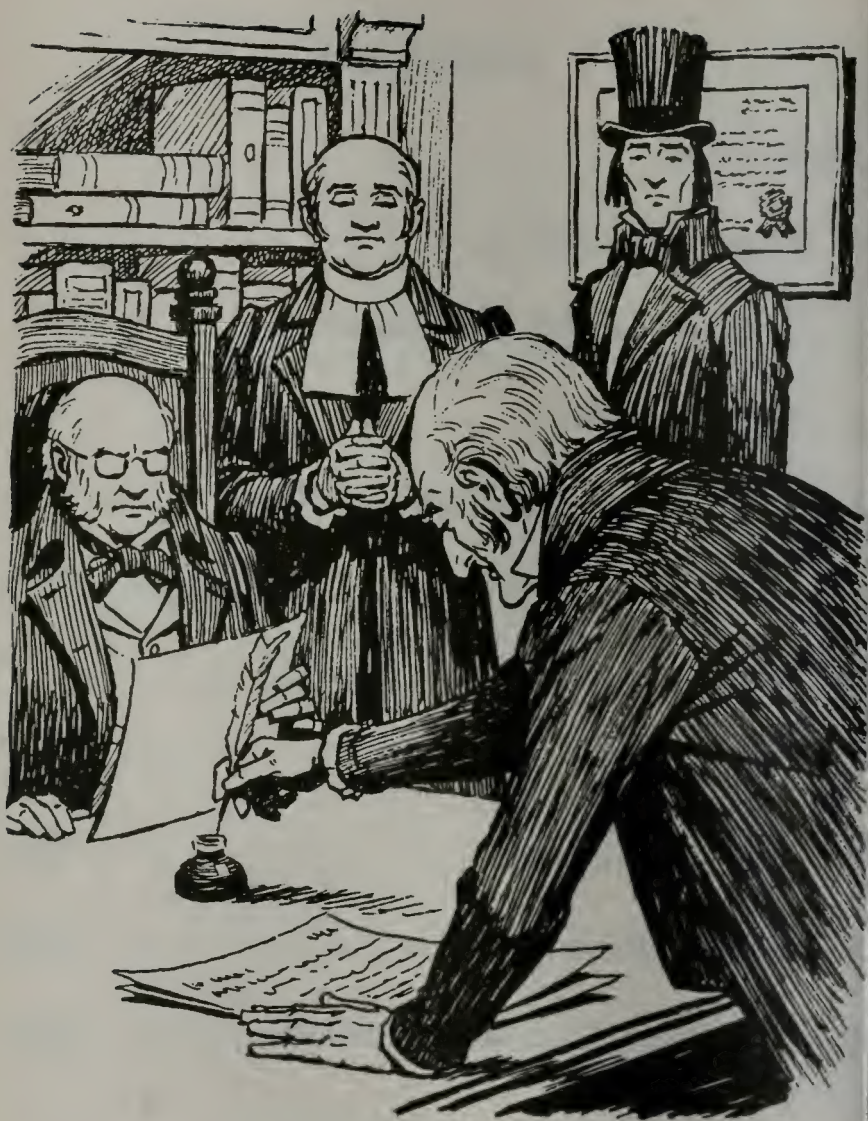
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**A CHRISTMAS
CAROL**
Charles Dickens

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Ebenezer Scrooge Signs the Papers.

CHAPTER 1

Ebenezer Scrooge

Jacob Marley was dead. Everyone knew that. There was no doubt about that. All the official papers were properly signed by witnesses to make them legal. The clergyman signed the papers. The city clerk signed them. And the undertaker signed them. Even Ebenezer Scrooge signed them, and everyone knew that anything Scrooge signed had to be perfectly legal!

Yes, Marley was as dead as a doornail.

Did Scrooge know he was dead? Of course he did. How could he not know? After all,

A Christmas Carol

Scrooge and Marley had been business partners for many years. Besides, Scrooge was the executor of Marley's estate, as decreed in his will. Scrooge was Marley's only friend, his only mourner, and the only beneficiary of his estate. Still, Scrooge was an excellent business man and even on the day of Marley's death, he took advantage of the sad event by offering his customers special bargains.

Yes, Scrooge knew without a doubt that Marley was dead, but for some reason, which no one knew, he never painted old Marley's name out of the sign that stood above their warehouse door. It still read, "Scrooge and Marley."

But Scrooge was a tight-fisted old man, squeezing every penny out of a bargain, showing no mercy to those who owed him money, and wrenching every minute of work out of his employees. Yes, he was a cold, solitary old man—cold inside and cold outside. His cold heart froze every feature about



The Scrooge and Marley Warehouse

A Christmas Carol

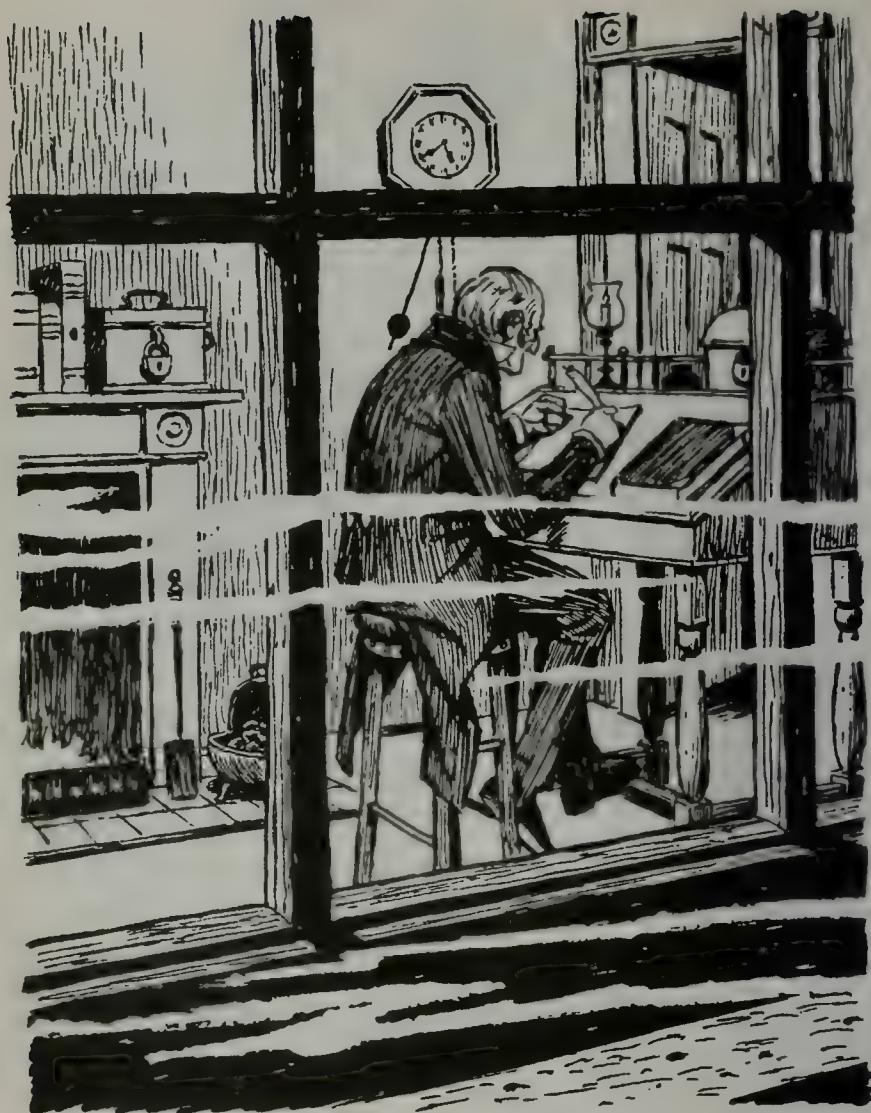
him—his pointed nose, his shriveled cheeks, his red eyes, his thin blue lips, his wiry chin, and his harsh, grating voice. He even kept everything around him cold; his office was as cold as ice and never felt the slightest warmth, not even at Christmas.

But neither heat nor cold bothered Scrooge. Neither did people. Nobody ever smiled at him in the streets. Nobody ever asked, "My dear Scrooge, how are you?" Nobody ever offered, "Why don't you visit us?" No beggars came up to him to plead for a trifle. No children ever asked him what time it was. No man or woman ever came up to him to ask directions. Even blind men's dogs led their masters off into doorways and up side streets when they saw Scrooge coming.

And did Scrooge care?... No! He actually liked this. He went through life warning all people to keep away from him!



Even a Blind Man's Dog Avoids Scrooge.



Scrooge Is Busy at Work.

CHAPTER 2

Visitors to the Warehouse

It was the afternoon of Christmas Eve and old Scrooge sat busy at work in his office. It was a cold, foggy, bleak day, and Scrooge could hear people in the street outside breathing heavily and stamping their feet on the stone pavement to keep warm. Even though it was only three o'clock, it was already dark, and candles were beginning to appear in the windows of nearby offices.

The fog outside was so thick that it seemed to seep into the office through every keyhole and every slight opening in the walls.

A Christmas Carol

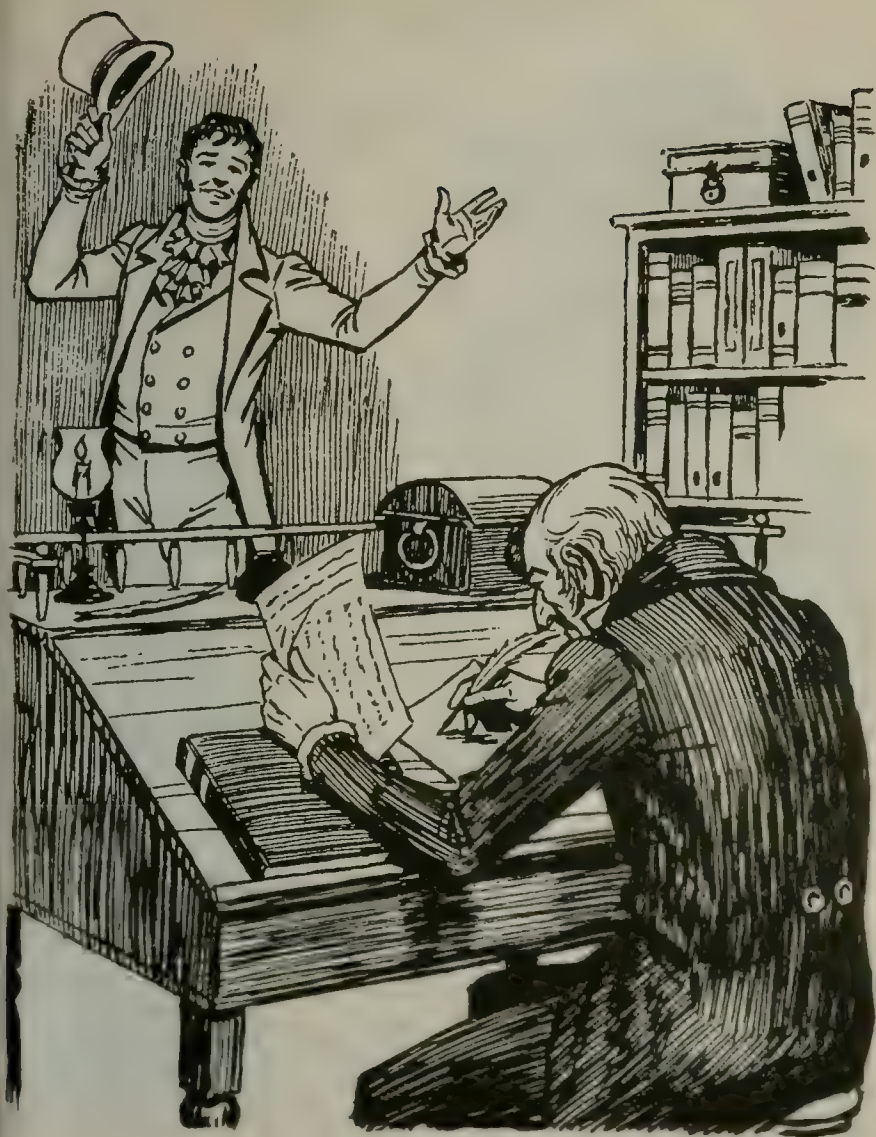
The door to Scrooge's office was open so that he could keep an eye on his clerk writing letters in his tiny office. In Scrooge's own office, a small fire burned, but the one in the clerk's office was so much smaller that it seemed to have only one coal burning. Still, the poor clerk couldn't refuel the fire for Scrooge kept the coal-box in his own office, and even threatened to fire the young man if he dared come in to ask for more. So Bob Cratchit, the clerk, tried to warm himself at the candle that burned at his table, but he did not succeed.

Suddenly, a voice interrupted Scrooge in the midst of his work.

"A Merry Christmas, Uncle!" came a cheerful voice. It was old man Scrooge's nephew, Fred—a handsome young man with sparkling eyes and a glowing face.

"Bah!" said Scrooge, without lifting his head. "Humbug!"

"Christmas a humbug, Uncle!" said the



"A Merry Christmas, Uncle!"

A Christmas Carol

young man. "You can't meant that?"

"I do," said Scrooge. "*Merry Christmas*, indeed! What right do *you* have to be merry? You're poor!"

"Come, Uncle," said Fred, gaily. "What right do *you* have to be grouchy? You're rich!"

And since Scrooge had no answer at the moment, he said, "Bah!" and followed it with "Humbug!"

"Don't be cross, Uncle!" said Fred.

"What else should I be," said Scrooge, "when I live in a world filled with fools? What's so merry about Christmas? It's a time for paying bills when you don't have any money; it's a time when you're a year older and not a penny richer. If I had my way, every fool who goes around saying 'Merry Christmas' would be boiled in his own Christmas pudding! Why, I wouldn't care if Christmas never ever came again!"

"Uncle!" cried his nephew. "What a dreadful thing to say! Christmas means so



“What’s So Merry About Christmas?”

A Christmas Carol

much. First, it is a sacred religious time. And then, too, it is a time for forgiving, a time to be charitable and pleasant. It is the only time when people seem to think of others so freely and open up their hearts to each other."

From the other office came the sound of the clerk applauding. Then, realizing immediately what he had done, Bob Cratchit busied himself poking at the remaining coal in the fire and extinguishing the last spark.

"If I hear another sound from you," Scrooge called out to his clerk, "you'll celebrate Christmas by looking for a new job."

"Don't be angry, Uncle," said Fred. "I simply came to invite you to have Christmas dinner with us tomorrow."

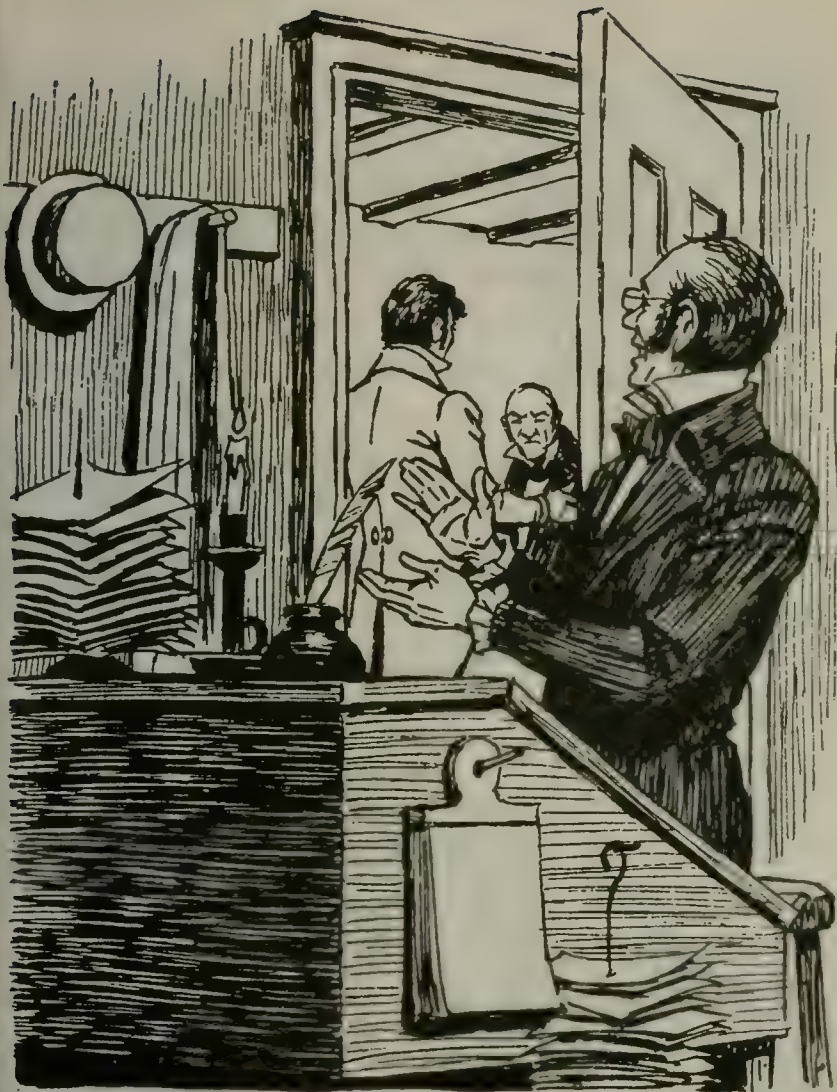
"Why, I would rather see you down below with the Devil first than come to your home!"

"But why, Uncle? Why?"

"Why did you get married?"

"Because I fell in love."

"Because you fell in love!" growled Scrooge.



Bob Cratchit Applauds Fred's Words.

A Christmas Carol

"Bah! That's the only thing in the world more ridiculous than a Merry Christmas. Now, leave me, sir. Good afternoon."

"But, Uncle, you never even came to see me *before* I was married. Why are you giving my marriage as a reason for not coming?"

"I said good afternoon," said Scrooge sternly.

"I am truly sorry from the bottom of my heart, Uncle. We have never had a quarrel. I have tried to keep the spirit of Christmas and I will to the end. So, Merry Christmas, Uncle!"

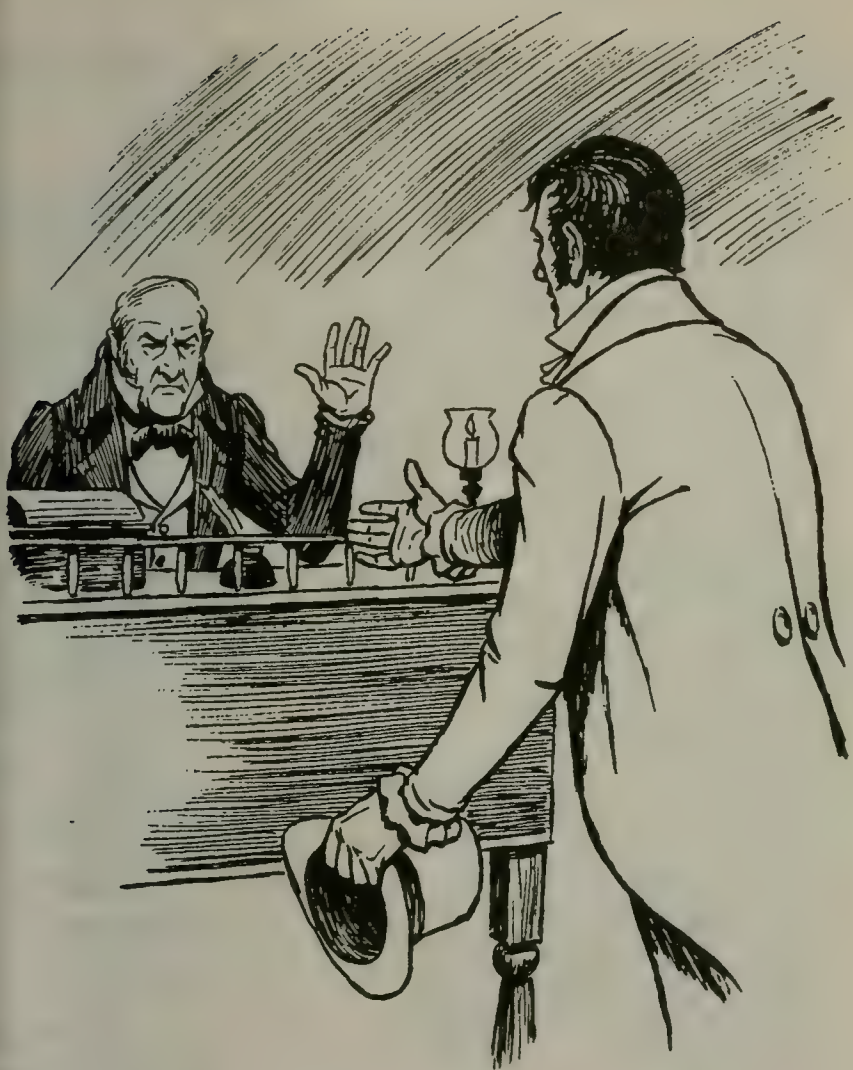
"Good-bye!" said Scrooge.

"And a Happy New Year!" called Fred.

"Good-bye!"

Fred left the room, still smiling. He stopped at the outer door to wish a Merry Christmas to Bob Cratchit, who returned the greeting as he let the young man out the door.

At that moment, two rather stout gentlemen, with books and papers in their hands, appeared at that same door, asking to see



Scrooge Refuses Fred's Invitation.

A Christmas Carol

Scrooge. Bob Cratchit showed them into Scrooge's office.

They bowed as a greeting to Scrooge.

One of the men consulted his list and asked, "Is this Scrooge and Marley's?"

Scrooge nodded.

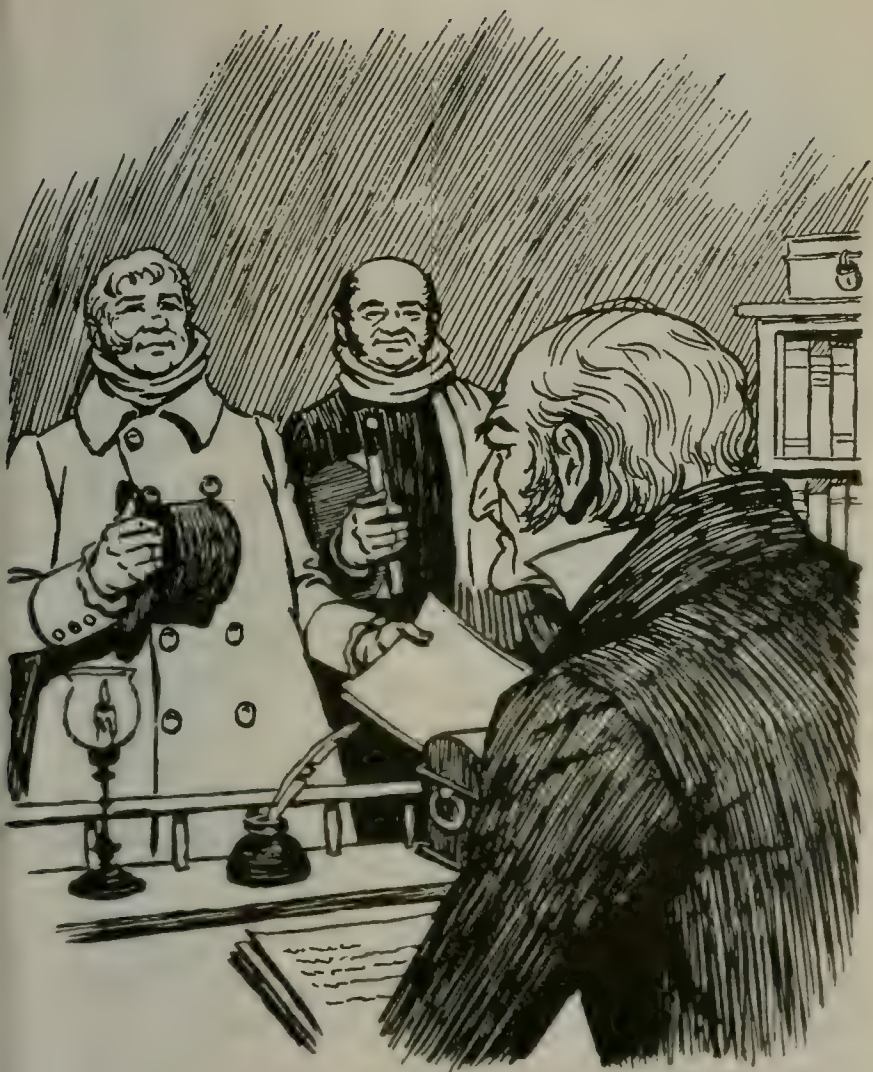
"And am I speaking to Mr. Scrooge or Mr. Marley?" continued the man.

"Mr. Marley has been dead for seven years," answered Scrooge. "In fact, seven years ago tonight."

"Well, then I am certain that you, as his partner, Mr. Scrooge, will want to be as *generous* as he was in donating to the charity we represent."

Upon hearing the word "generous," Scrooge shook his head, for he knew that Marley was no more generous than he was.

But the man seemed to pay no mind to Scrooge's negative shake of his head, and he took up a pen from Scrooge's desk and explained, "At this festive time of the year, we



Requesting a Donation

A Christmas Carol

try to help the poor and destitute who are suffering. There are many thousands who do not have even the bare necessities of life, sir."

"Bah!" replied Scrooge. "There are prisons and workhouses to take care of these people, and laws made by the government to see to their welfare. As far as I am concerned, the government is looking after them well enough."

"But, sir," said the man, "we wish to bring a little extra cheer to these unfortunates. We are raising money to buy some food and drink and a little warmth. At this time of the year, everyone rejoices in giving. Now, how much of a donation may I put you down for?"

"Nothing!" replied Scrooge.

"Ah, you wish your gift to be anonymous?" asked the gentleman, smiling.

"I wish to be left alone," said Scrooge. "I do not consider Christmas merry and I have no desire to make, idle, worthless people merry. Their welfare is not my problem. I have my



Scrooge Refuses!

A Christmas Carol

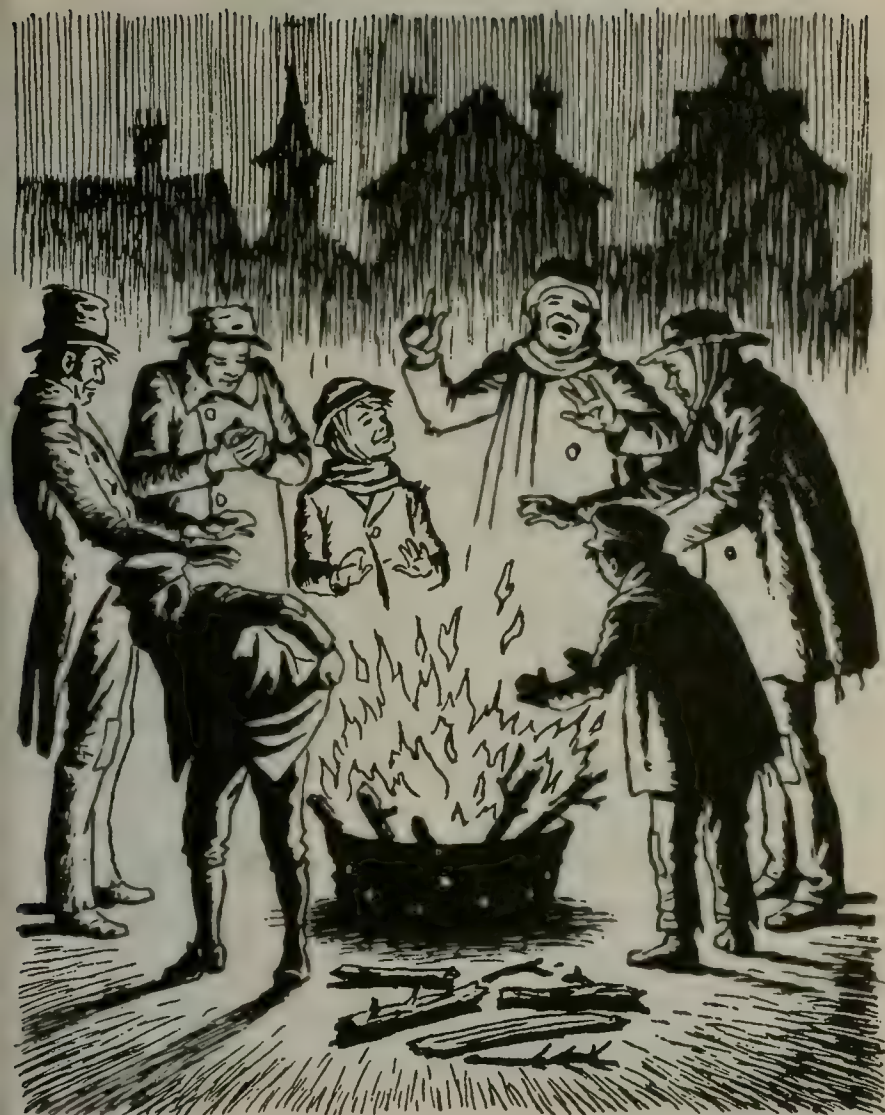
own business to attend to and I do not concern myself with other people's business. Now, good afternoon, gentlemen."

"But, sir, . . ." began the gentleman, "there is never enough government support for these poor people, and many will die!"

"Bah! Humbug!" exclaimed Scrooge. "Then let them die! We already have enough of a surplus population of these wretched creatures anyhow!"

Realizing that they could do nothing to move the old man, the two gentlemen left, and Scrooge returned to his work, feeling quite pleased with himself.

Meanwhile, the fog and darkness had thickened outside and the cold had become more intense. In the street across from the warehouse, some workmen who had been repairing a gas line in the road had lit a fire in a bucket, and a group of ragged men and boys gathered round it to warm their hands. The dancing fire and their good spirits soon



Warming Their Hands at the Fire

A Christmas Carol

prompted one old man, his voice cracking, to sing the first few bars of "God Rest You, Merry Gentlemen." Soon, other voices from these ragged men and boys joined in.

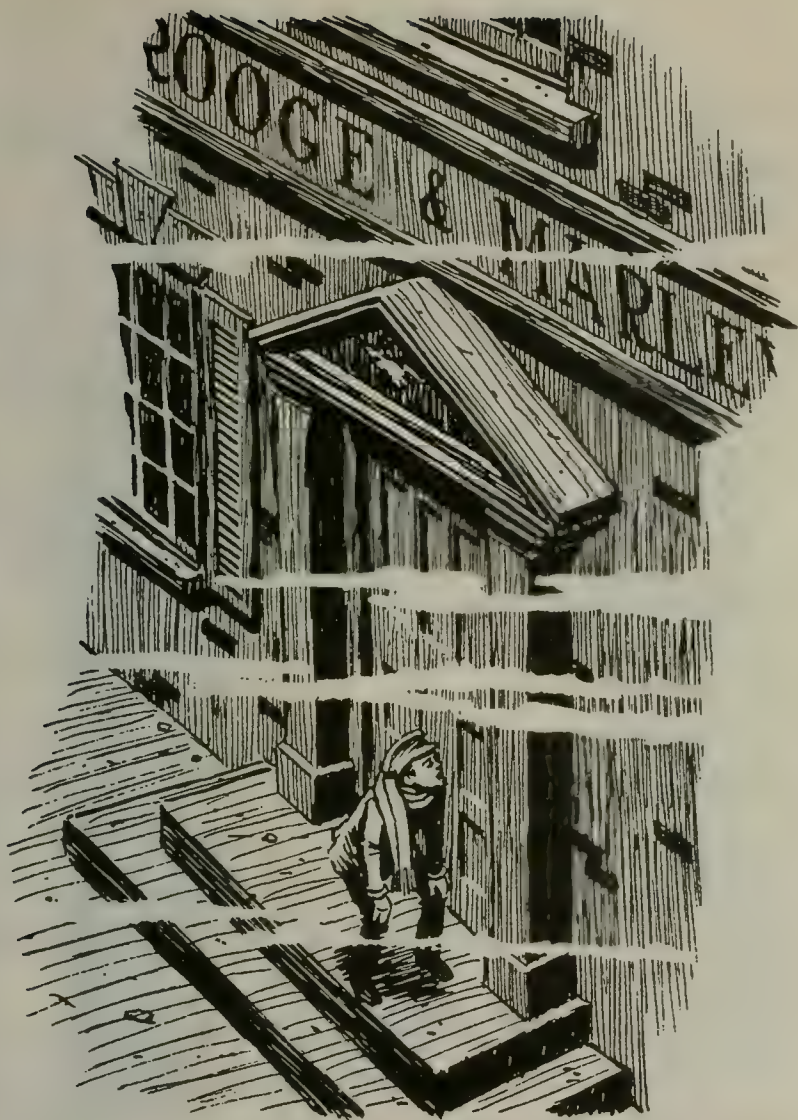
One young lad, his nose frozen and numb from the cold, left the group and crossed the street to the Scrooge and Marley Warehouse. He stooped down at Scrooge's keyhole to sing some lines of the Christmas carol to him. But at the first sound of

*God rest you, merry gentlemen,
May nothing you dismay,*

Scrooge seized his ruler and shook it toward his closed door so violently that the singer jumped back from the keyhole and fled in terror.

By now, it was closing-time at the warehouse. Scrooge got down off his stool and announced it to Cratchit.

The clerk immediately blew out his candle and took his hat and long woolen scarf down from the hook.



A Caroler at Scrooge's Keyhole

A Christmas Carol

"And I suppose you'll want tomorrow off?" said Scrooge to the young man.

"If it is convenient for you, sir."

"It is *not* convenient," said Scrooge, "and it is not fair either. If I was to dock you a day's wages from your pay, you'd think I was being unfair, wouldn't you?"

The clerk smiled weakly.

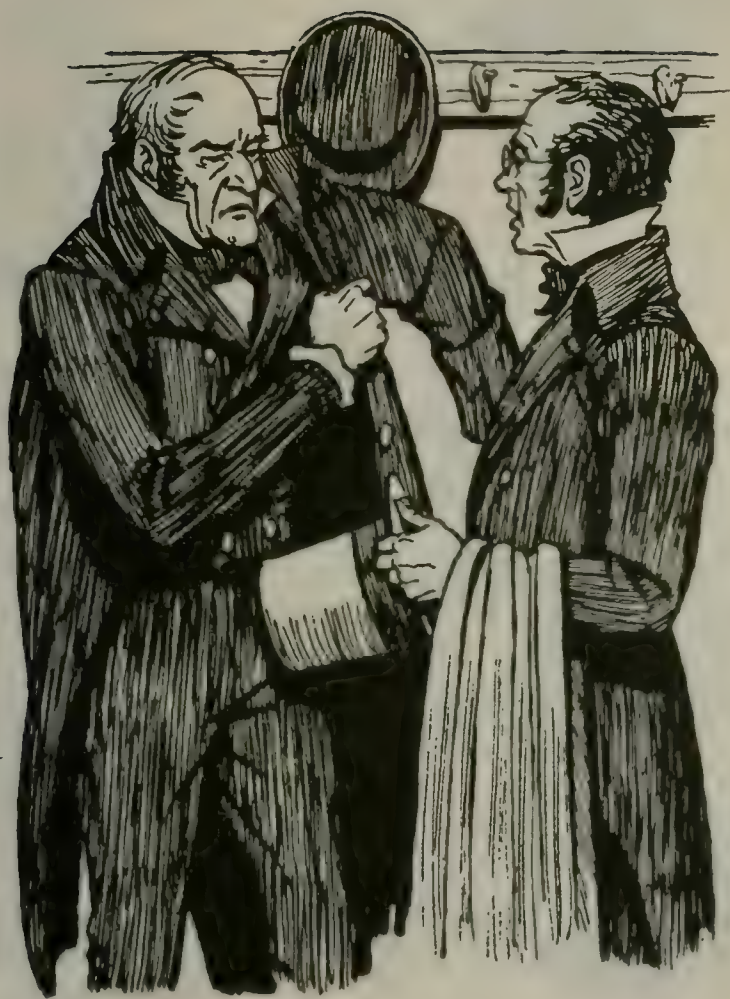
"And yet," continued Scrooge, "you don't think it unfair that I should pay you a day's wages for no work."

"But it's only once a year, sir," pleaded Cratchit.

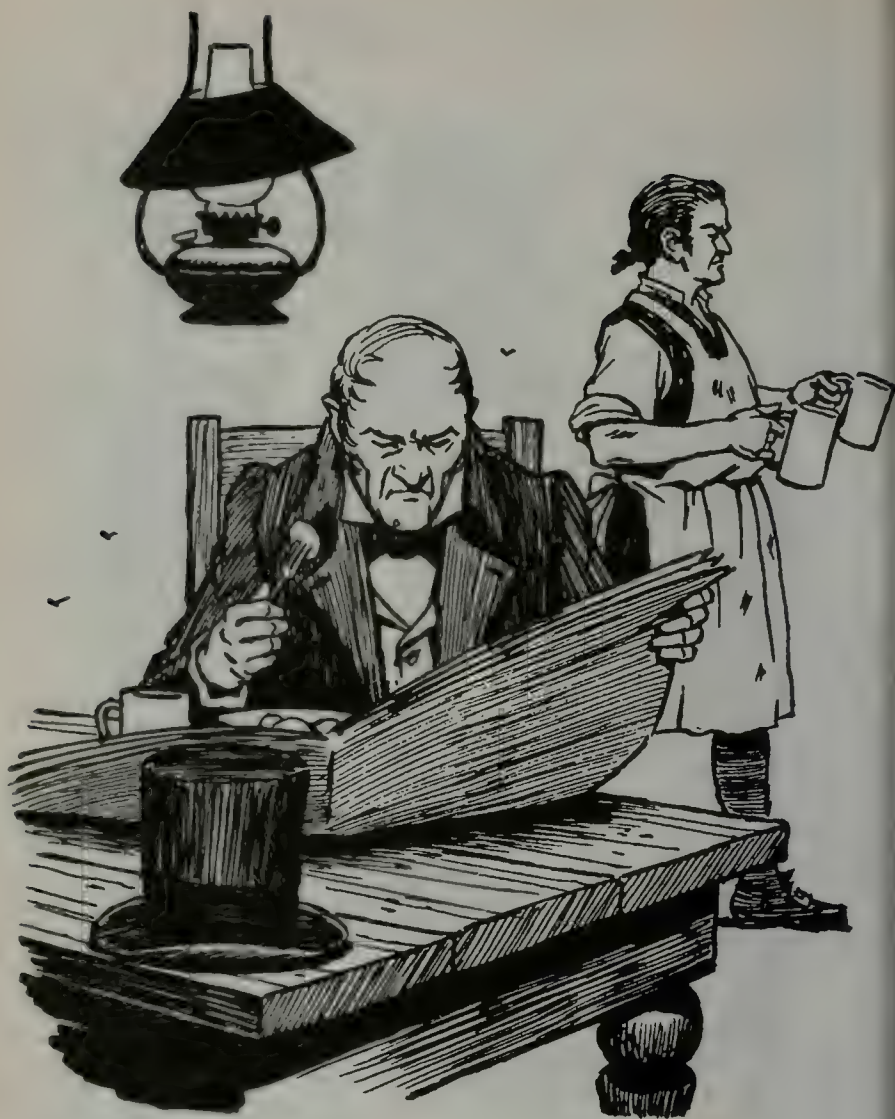
"Yes, once a year—every twenty-fifth of December!" said Scrooge. "It's a poor excuse for picking a man's pocket, making me pay you for staying home! Well then, Cratchit, you'd better be here earlier on the following morning."

"Oh, yes, sir," promised the young man.

With that, Scrooge buttoned up his coat, slammed on his hat, and walked out growling.



"I Suppose You'll Want Tomorrow Off?"



A Melancholy Dinner

CHAPTER 3

Marley's Ghost

Scrooge stopped at his usual tavern, took his usual table, and ate his usual melancholy dinner. No other customers greeted him and he greeted none of them. He passed the time reading all his newspapers and checking his bankbooks. And when all the papers had been read and all the bankbooks checked, Scrooge went home to bed.

Scrooge lived in the apartment that once belonged to his partner, Jacob Marley. It was a gloomy old place in a small building that was now surrounded by other, larger ones.

A Christmas Carol

The building was such a dreary one that no one chose to live there. So the other rooms were rented out as offices.

The front courtyard was dark in the fog and frost as Scrooge entered the gate and walked to the door. As he inserted the key in the lock, his eye caught a glimpse of the large shiny, brass knocker on the door. It was the same knocker he had been seeing morning and night for all the years he lived in the building. But suddenly, tonight, it was not a knocker that stared back at him from the door... no... it was the face of Jacob Marley!

"But Jacob Marley is dead!" thought Scrooge, frozen to the spot. "My eyes must be playing tricks on me. Just because of those visitors I had this afternoon—those two men seeking charity—my thoughts returned to Marley, quite by chance."

Now Scrooge stared harder at the knocker. Here *was* Marley's face, with a dismal light around it!... Marley's face with ghostly



The Face of Jacob Marley!

A Christmas Carol

spectacles raised on its ghostly forehead. . . Marley's face with hair blowing strangely and wildly about his head . . . Marley's face with eyes wide open and bulging, but not moving.

As Scrooge stood there, unable to tear his gaze from the door, the strange vision became a knocker again.

"Did I imagine that vision in the knocker?" he asked himself, with his heart thumping nervously.

But since he could find no answer, Scrooge forced himself to turn the key in the lock and walk inside.

Yes, he decided, he must have imagined it all. Still, before he shut the door, he looked carefully behind it as if he half-expected to see Marley. but there was nothing—only the screws and nuts that fastened the knocker to the door.

"Pooh, pooh!" cried Scrooge, slamming the door with a bang. He was angry with himself



Only Screws and Nuts Behind the Door

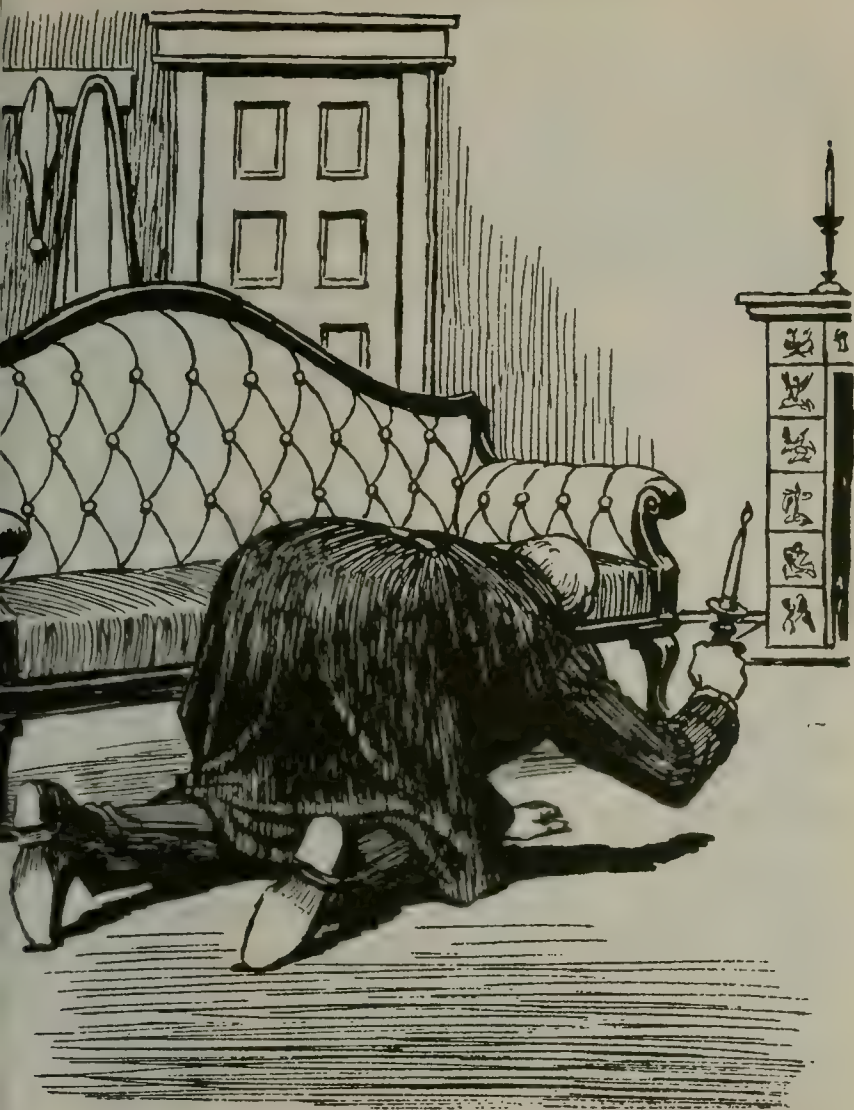
A Christmas Carol

as he lit his candle and climbed the stairs to his rooms.

Although Scrooge had always liked the darkness, now, as he entered his apartment, it made him remember Marley's face in the knocker. He walked nervously from room to room, first with his candle held high, then poking it into corners and under furniture. Nobody was under the table; nobody was under the sofa; nobody was under the bed; nobody was in the closet. Scrooge even looked inside his dressing-gown as it hung on the hook on the wall. But nobody was inside it either. A small fire was in the grate; a little pot of broth was warming on the fireplace ledge.

Satisfied that he was alone, Scrooge closed and locked his door, which he didn't normally do. Then, taking off his coat and jacket and putting on his dressing-gown, slippers, and nightcap, Scrooge sat down before the fire to eat his broth.

The fire was low—very low for such a bitter



Scrooge Checks Under the Furniture.

A Christmas Carol

night. As Scrooge moved closer to get every bit of warmth from it, he looked at the familiar tiles set into the fireplace around the hearth. He remembered remarking to himself when he had first moved in that the fireplace must have been built by a Dutchman years ago, for the tiles were old Dutch scenes illustrating the Bible. But now these scenes were suddenly gone, and in their place appeared the shape of old Marley's head, staring out at Scrooge from each smooth tile!

"Humbug!" cried Scrooge angrily, as he jumped up and strode across the room.

After a few minutes of pacing, Scrooge returned to the fireside and sat down again. As he leaned his head back against the chair, his eyes were raised and his glance came to rest on a bell. It was a bell that had always been in the room—a bell that had hung there, unused.

Now, suddenly, this long-silent bell began to swing. Scrooge stared, first with astonishment, then with terror. At first, the bell



Marley's Head Stares Out From the Tiles.

A Christmas Carol

swung softly, barely making a sound. But soon it rang out loudly and was followed, almost in a chorus, by every bell in the house!

The ringing may have lasted a minute, but to Scrooge it seemed like an hour. Then, suddenly, the bells stopped.

Just as Scrooge was about to catch his breath, a new sound gripped his heart—a clanking noise from deep down below, as if someone were dragging a heavy chain over the wine casks stored in the basement. With a shudder, Scrooge recalled having heard that ghosts in haunted houses dragged chains and that. . . .

At that moment, Scrooge heard the cellar door fly open with a bang. It was followed by the sound of the dragging chain coming up the stairs. Up, up, closer and closer to his door!

"It's humbug!" cried Scrooge. "I won't believe it."

But no sooner were the angry words out of his mouth than his face went white. His eyes



The Bell Rings Out.

A Christmas Carol

popped and his jaw dropped open in amazement. For coming through the heavy locked door was Jacob Marley, or rather his *Ghost*! There was no doubt, for it was Jacob Marley's pigtail, his usual waistcoat, his tights and boots. And he was dragging a chain that was wound around his waist...but what a strange chain it was—made of cash boxes, keys, padlocks, ledger books, and heavy steel purses. Marley's body was transparent, so that Scrooge, looking at him, could see right through to the two buttons at the rear of his coat. As he raised his head, Scrooge met the death-cold eyes of the Ghost as they stared back at him.

"Well, now," said Scrooge coldly, "what do you want with me?"

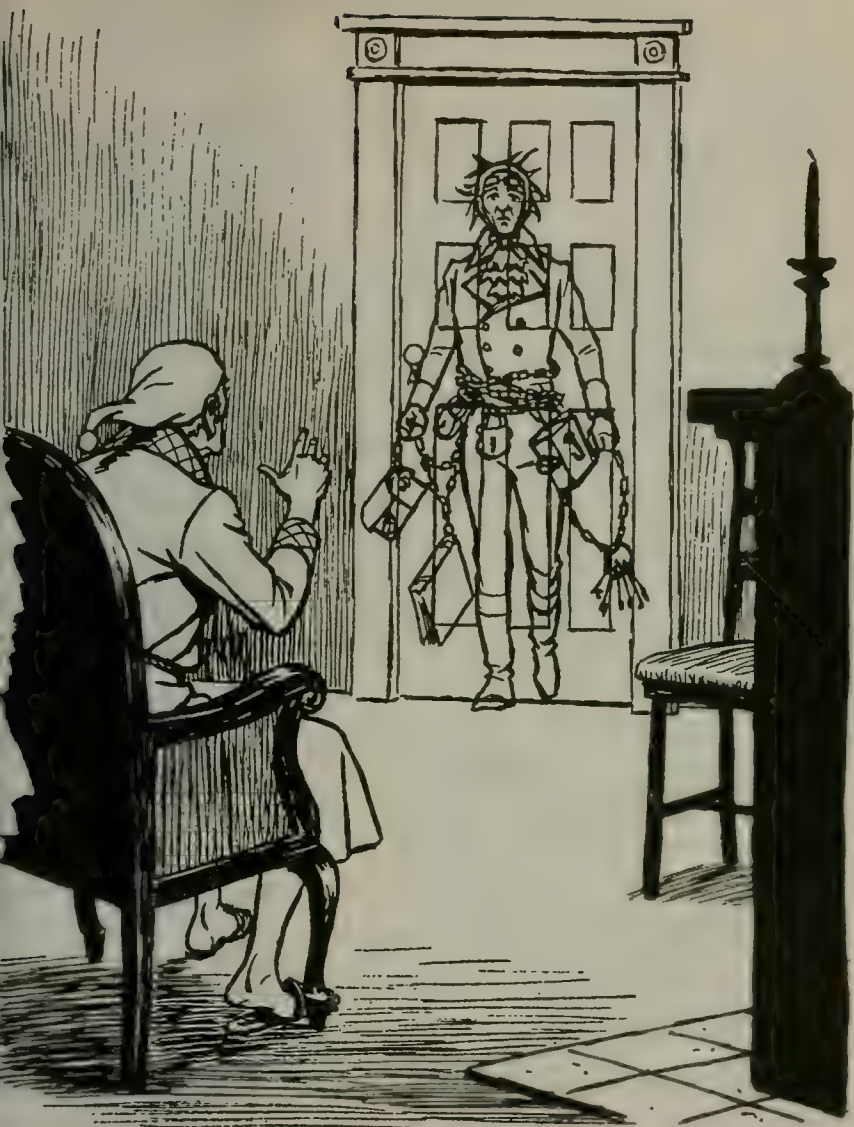
"Much!" It *was* Marley's voice!

"Who are you?" demanded Scrooge.

"Ask me who I *was*," replied the Ghost.

"Who *were* you then?"

"In life, I was your partner, Jacob Marley,"



Marley's Ghost Comes Through the Door.

A Christmas Carol

said the Ghost as he sat down in a chair alongside the fireplace. Then he turned to stare directly into Scrooge's eyes and said flatly, "You don't believe in me."

"I don't," said Scrooge.

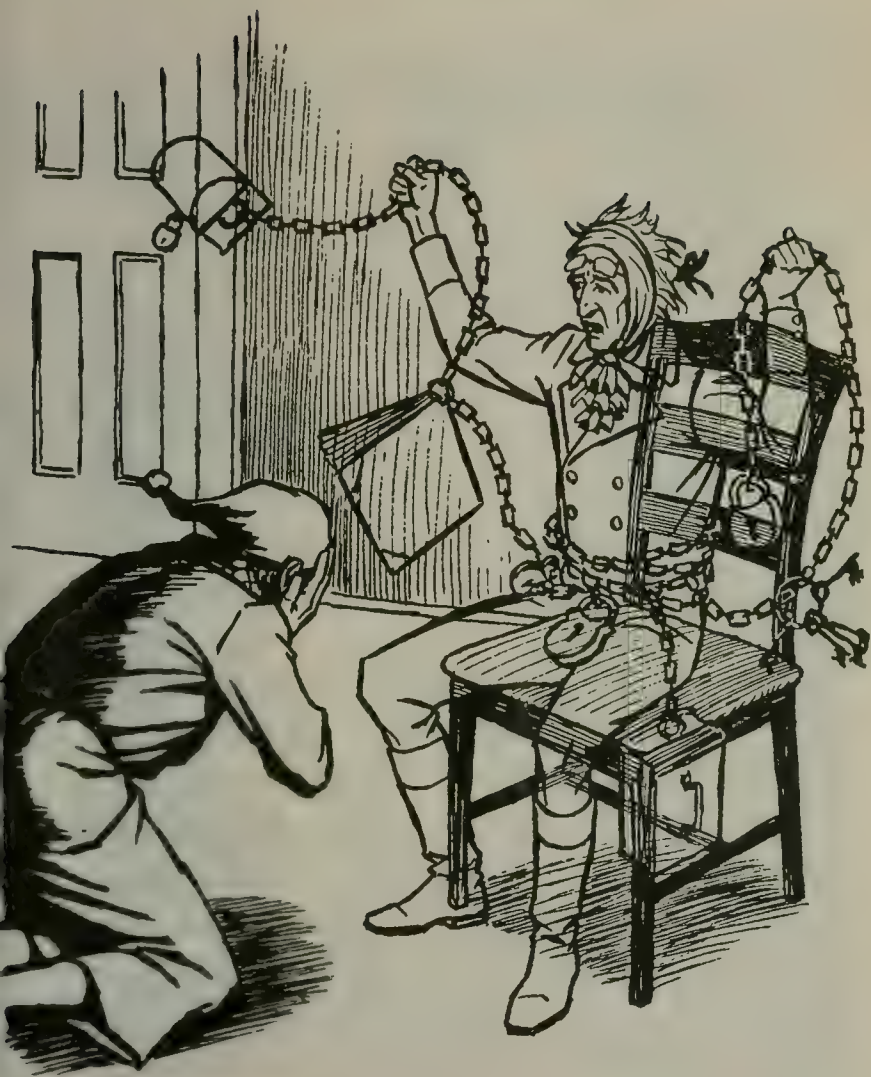
"What proof do you need that I am real" asked the Ghost. "You see and hear me."

"But my sight and hearing could be affected by an upset stomach, and I *do* suffer from many of them," replied Scrooge. "You may be a bit of undigested beef, or a piece of uncooked potato, or a crumb of cheese, or even a fragment of a toothpick I might have swallowed. Humbug, I tell you! Humbug!"

Hearing this, the Ghost let out a frightful cry and shook his chain with such a horrible noise that Scrooge fell to his knees and buried his face in his hands.

"Have Mercy!" he cried. "I believe in you. Yes! But why have you come to me?"

"The spirit in every man should walk among his fellow men when he is alive," said



A Horrible Noise!

A Christmas Carol

the Ghost. "But if that spirit does not do so during a man's lifetime, it must do it after his death. The spirit must share the unhappiness on earth that he might have been able to turn to happiness when he was alive." And again the Ghost let out a cry and shook his chain.

"Why are you chained?" asked Scrooge.

"It is a chain I, myself, made during my life," said the Ghost. "I made it, link by link, willingly, just as you are now doing. But your chain, Scrooge, is much longer and much heavier than mine, for yours has grown much these last seven years.

Scrooge looked around him on the floor, half-expecting to see yards and yards of iron chains. But he saw nothing.

"Jacob!" he begged. "Jacob Marley, tell me more! Speak to me! Comfort me!"

"I cannot comfort you, Ebenezer Scrooge," said the Ghost. "Comfort is given to other men. Nor can I tell you much more—only that my spirit never thought of my fellow men



“I Made the Chain Myself.”

A Christmas Carol

when I was alive. It never walked among them when I was alive. It never left our office when I was alive, never sought out those creatures I might have helped. So now I am destined to roam throughout the world, never to rest and never to have peace. For no matter how I misused my life and no matter how much I regret my selfishness, there is no way for me to make amends!"

"But you were a good business man, Jacob," said Scrooge.

"Business!" cried the Ghost. "My fellow man should have been my business; charity should have been my business; mercy, kindness, and generosity should have been my business. And at this time of year I suffer the most, for I remember all the Christmas times I walked through crowds of my fellow men with my eyes down—never looking up to that Heavenly star that led the Wise Men to a stable so long ago." And again he let out a cry.

Scrooge began to tremble violently.



Marley's Ghost Suffers at Christmas.

A Christmas Carol

"Hear me!" cried the Ghost. "My time is nearly up. I am not allowed to explain to you why you can see me now. But I can tell you that I have sat beside, you, invisible, for many and many a day."

Scrooge shivered and wiped the perspiration from his brow.

"I am here tonight to warn you, Ebenezer that you still have a chance of escaping the same fate as mine."

"You were always my good friend," said Scrooge gratefully. "Thank you!"

"You will be haunted by Three Spirits," continued the Ghost.

"If that is the chance you mentioned, I think I'd rather not."

"Without their visits, you cannot avoid the fate I had. You can expect the first Spirit tomorrow night at one o'clock."

"Couldn't they all come at once and let me be done with it, Jacob?"

The Ghost ignored Scrooge's question.



"You Will Be Haunted by Three Spirits."

A Christmas Carol

“You can expect the second Spirit on the following night, at the same time. And the third will come at the last stroke of twelve on the next night. You will not see me anymore, Ebenezer. But for your own sake, remember all that I have told you.”

The Ghost backed away from Scrooge. With each step he took, the window raised itself a little, so that by the time the Ghost had reached it, it was wide open. He beckoned Scrooge to come to him, and when the two were only a step from each other, Marley's Ghost held up his hand.

As Scrooge stopped, he heard strange sounds in the air—cries of sorrow and wails of regret. The Ghost joined in with these sounds as he floated out through the window and into the dark night.

Scrooge rushed to the window and looked out. The air was filled with ghosts, wandering every which way, moaning as they floated. Every one of them wore chains. Scrooge



The Ghost Floats Through the Window.

A Christmas Carol

recognized one of them as a greedy banker he had known. He was now an old ghost with a huge iron safe attached to his ankle. He was floating over a poor woman sitting out in the cold, an infant in her arms. And he was crying pitifully because he did not have the power to help her. It was a power he did have once, but did not use it when he was alive.

Soon the spirits faded away and Scrooge closed the window. He went to the door through which the Ghost had entered and examined it carefully. It was still double-locked, as he had fastened it with his own hands earlier. Scrooge was about to say "Humbug!" but he got no further than "Hum—" when he stopped. Was it because of his conversation with the Ghost? Was it because the hour was late? Or was it because he was terrified of his fate?

Scrooge did not even bother to take off his dressing-gown, but lay down on his bed and fell asleep instantly.



An Old Ghost Cannot Help a Poor Woman.



Scrooge Tries To Figure Out the Time.

CHAPTER 4

The Ghost of Christmas Past

When Scrooge awoke, it was so dark that he could not tell where the walls ended and the windows began. As he was trying to decide what time it was, he heard the neighboring church clock strike twelve.

"Twelve!" cried Scrooge. "Why it was past two o'clock when I went to bed! It isn't possible that I slept through a whole date and into the next night. No it must be twelve noon."

With that, Scrooge scrambled out of bed and groped his way to the window. He rubbed

A Christmas Carol

the frost off it with the sleeve of his dressing gown, but all he could see outside was darkness and fog. There were no noises of people in the street as there would be if it were noon.

Scrooge slowly returned to his bed, more confused than ever. The more he thought about the lost time, the more confused he got.

"Marley's Ghost was a dream," he said over and over again, trying to reassure himself. But each time, he'd follow his own words with a question, "Or was it?"

Scrooge lay awake in the darkness while the church chime went three quarters more past the hour. Suddenly, he remembered that Marley's Ghost had warned him of a visit when the clock struck one.

That last quarter hour seemed to take so long that Scrooge almost convinced himself that he had dozed off and missed the one o'clock bell. Then the deep, dull hour bell struck one long tone.



Only Darkness and Fog Outside

A Christmas Carol

Lights suddenly flashed in his room and the curtains of his bed were drawn aside, *by a hand!*

Scrooge sat bolt upright in bed and found himself face to face with the unearthly visitor who had opened the curtains. It was a strange figure—like a child, yet like an old man. Its face was soft and smooth, with no sign of a wrinkle, yet its hair was white and hung down its back. Its arms were long and its hands were strong and muscular. Its legs and feet were bare. A pure white tunic trimmed with summer flowers covered its body, and it held a branch of fresh, green winter holly in one hand. But the strangest of all was the jet of light that shone from the top of its head—a light that lit up everything around it.

“Are you a Spirit, sir, that I was told to expect?” asked Scrooge.

“I am,” came a soft, gentle voice. “I am the Ghost of Christmas Past. *Your* past Ebenezer Scrooge.”



The Ghost of Chistmas Past

A Christmas Carol

"And why have you come here?"

"For your welfare, Ebenezer Scrooge."

"Why, thank you, Spirit," said Scrooge, who then thought to himself, "but I think a night of undisturbed sleep would be better for my welfare!"

The Spirit, who surely had the power to hear Scrooge's thoughts, then cried out, "Let us proceed with saving you, Ebenezer Scrooge!"

And the ghost put out its strong hand and took Scrooge gently by the arm.

"Rise and walk with me!" it commanded.

Scrooge would have like to argue that the weather and the hour were not appropriate for a walk, that his bed was warm, and that he was wearing only a dressing-gown, slippers, and nightcap. But Scrooge found himself unable to resist that gentle grasp, so he rose and followed the Spirit to the window.

"I am a mortal," cried Scrooge as the Spirit prepared to go out the window. "I shall fall."



Scrooge Cannot Resist the Spirit's Grasp.

A Christmas Carol

"All I need do is touch your *here*," said the Spirit, touching Scrooge's heart, "and you will not fall anywhere!"

As the Spirit spoke these words, the two passed through the closed window and found themselves far away from the city, standing on an open country road. The city had completely vanished. Not a trace of it was to be seen. The fog and darkness had vanished too and it was a clear, cold, wintry day, with snow covering the fields alongside the road.

"Good Heavens!" cried Scrooge. "I was born in this countryside, and grew up here!" And for the next few moments, a thousand thoughts, hopes, joys, and cares of his childhood passed through his head.

"Your lips are trembling," said the Ghost. "And what is that on your cheek?"

"Only a pimple," muttered Scrooge unwilling to admit that it was a tear. "Please Spirit, lead me on."

"Do you remember the way?" asked the Spirit.



"What Is That on Your Cheek?"

A Christmas Carol

“Remember it!” cried Scrooge eagerly. “I could walk it blindfolded.”

“Strange, then, that you have forgotten it for so many years!” said the Ghost.

As they walked along the road, Scrooge recognized every gate, every post, every tree. Soon, a little town appeared in the distance, with its bridge, its church, and winding river.

Some ponies came trotting towards them, with boys on their backs calling happily to other boys in carts driven by farmers.

“These are only shadows of things past,” said the Ghost. “They cannot see us.”

As the merry travelers got closer, Scrooge knew every boy by name. . . . But why was he so overjoyed to see them? Why did his cold eyes glisten with tears and his heart leap up as the boys went past? Why was he filled with gladness when he heard them wish each other a Merry Christmas? After all, what was merry about Christmas to Ebenezer Scrooge?



Scrooge Knows Every Boy By Name.

A Christmas Carol

"That school up ahead is not quite empty," said the Spirit. "One single child, neglected by his family and friends, is still there."

"I know that," said Scrooge, sobbing. "I know him well."

They turned off the main road into a familiar lane and soon approached a large, red brick building. A weather vane sat on the roof, with a bell hanging from it. The building had seen some very poor days; most of its rooms were now rarely used; its walls were damp and covered with moss; many of its windows were broken; and its gate was rotting. The sheds outside were overrun with grass and chickens strutted through the empty stables.

As Scrooge and the Spirit entered a door off the dreary hall, they saw a bare room, with lines of desks still in position. At a desk sat one lone boy, reading. He had chosen a desk near the weak fire to try to keep warm.



An Old, Familiar School

A Christmas Carol

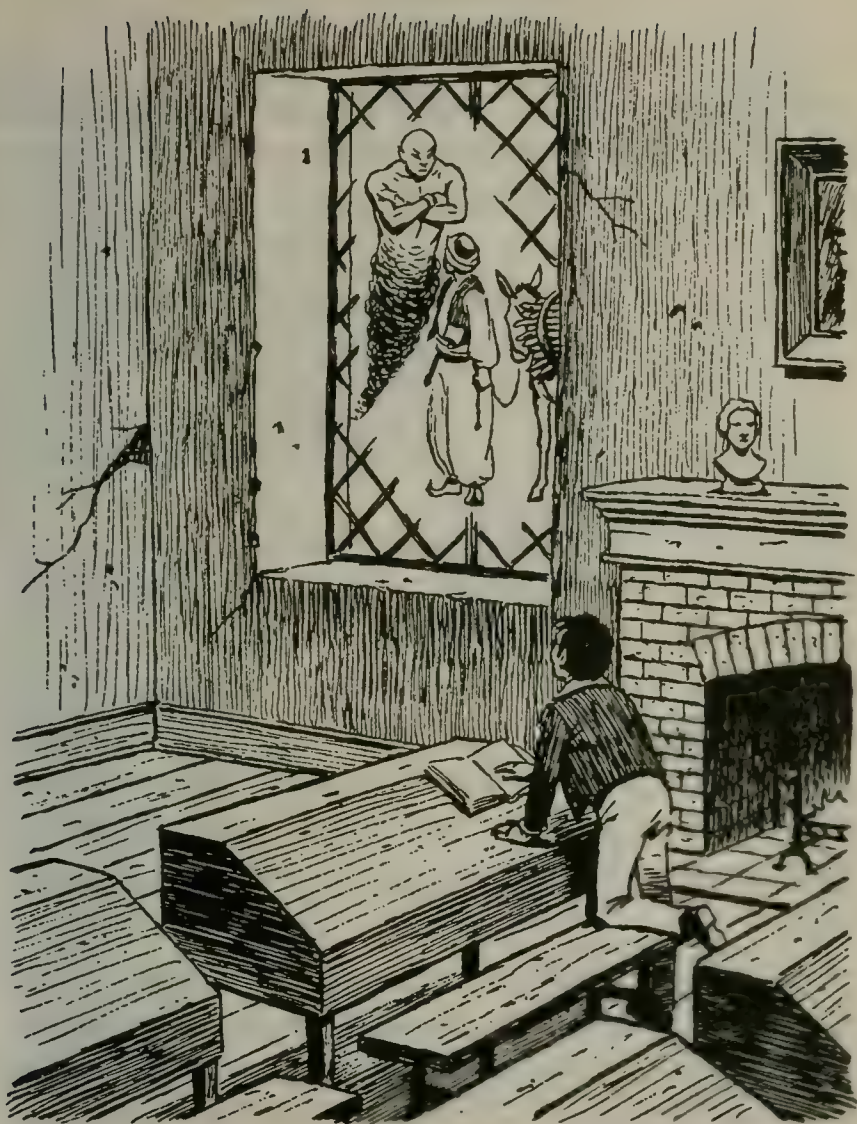
Scrooge sat down upon a bench and wept to see his long-forgotten self as a boy.

Suddenly, a strange figure appeared outside the schoolroom window. It was a woodcutter, with an ax stuck in his belt. He was leading a donkey loaded down with wood.

"Why, it's Ali Baba!" cried Scrooge joyously. "Dear old Ali Baba came to visit that boy sitting there reading! I remember one Christmas when the boy was left here all alone after his classmates had gone home for the holidays, and Ali Baba came to keep him company. And look! There's the Genie too!"

Was this really Ebenezer Scrooge, laughing and crying, excited over friends he had made in his childhood books—friends who kept him company when he was deserted by live ones?

"And there's the parrot!" cried Scrooge. "Poor Robinson Crusoe! Home again after sailing around his island. And there goes Friday, running towards the creek!"



Friends from Childhood Books

A Christmas Carol

Then Scrooge's voice suddenly took on a tone of pity. "Poor boy!" he said of his former self, and began to weep again. "I wish. . . but it's too late now."

"What do you wish?" asked the Spirit.

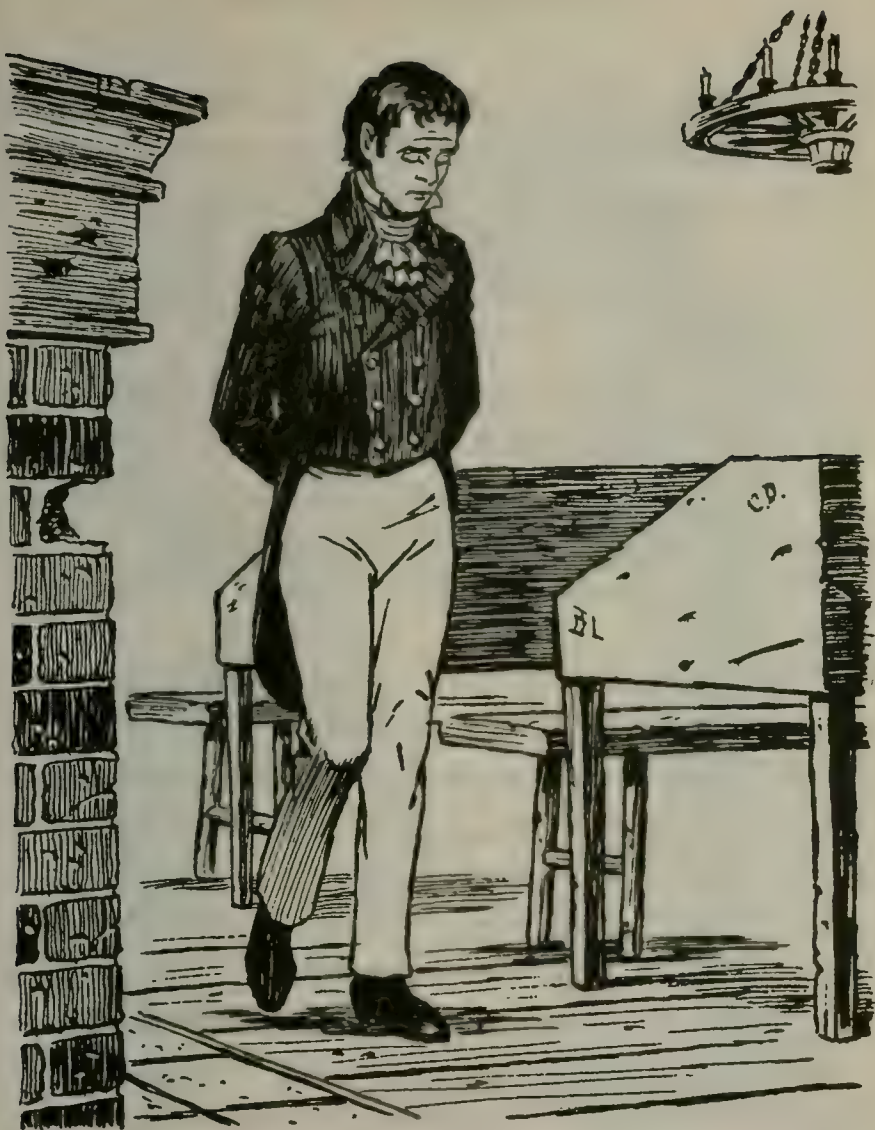
"Nothing," said Scrooge, "nothing. There was a boy singing Christmas carols at my door last night. I wish I had given him something, that's all."

The Spirit smiled thoughtfully and waved its hand. "Let us see another Christmas!"

At those words, Scrooge's former self grew taller, and the schoolroom became darker and dirtier. More windows were cracked, pieces of plaster had fallen out of the ceiling, more rooms were deserted; and even the chickens no longer strutted through the stables.

And the boy was alone again, when all the other boys had gone home for the holidays.

The boy was not reading now; he was walking up and down in despair.



A Boy Alone Again

A Christmas Carol

Scrooge, watching this, shook his head sadly and glanced toward the door, remembering what was to come.

The door opened and a little girl, much younger than the boy, came darting in. She threw her arms around the boy's neck and kissed him, calling him "dear, dear brother."

"I have come to bring you home, dear brother!" cried the little girl joyfully.

"Home, dear little Fan?" asked the puzzled boy.

"Yes!" cried the girl. "Home for ever and ever. Father is so much kinder now than he used to be. He speaks so gently to me now that one night I got up the courage to ask him if you could come home. And he said yes, you could. And he sent me in a coach to bring you. And we're going to be together all Christmas and have the merriest time in the world!"

Fan clapped her hands and laughed. She stood on tiptoe to hug her brother. And she



"I Have Come To Bring You Home!"

A Christmas Carol

began tugging eagerly at his sleeve, trying to pull him towards the door.

"She was a delicate creature," said the Spirit to Scrooge, "and she had a good heart!"

"Yes, she did," said Scrooge.

"But she died after she was grown, didn't she?" asked the Spirit. "Shortly after she was married and had children?"

"One child," answered Scrooge.

"Yes," said the Spirit. "Your nephew, Fred."

Scrooge seemed uneasy as he answered, "Yes."

Although it was only a moment since they had been in the school during the day, Scrooge and the Spirit were now transported to a busy, lighted city street. It was evening, and shadowy people came and went, and shadowy carts and coaches battled for space in the roads. Looking around him, Scrooge saw from the decorations in the shops that here, too, it was Christmas. He followed the



A Busy City Street

A Christmas Carol

Spirit until its shadowy outline stopped at a warehouse door.

"Do you recognize this?" asked the Ghost.

"Recognize it!" cried Scrooge. "I was apprenticed here."

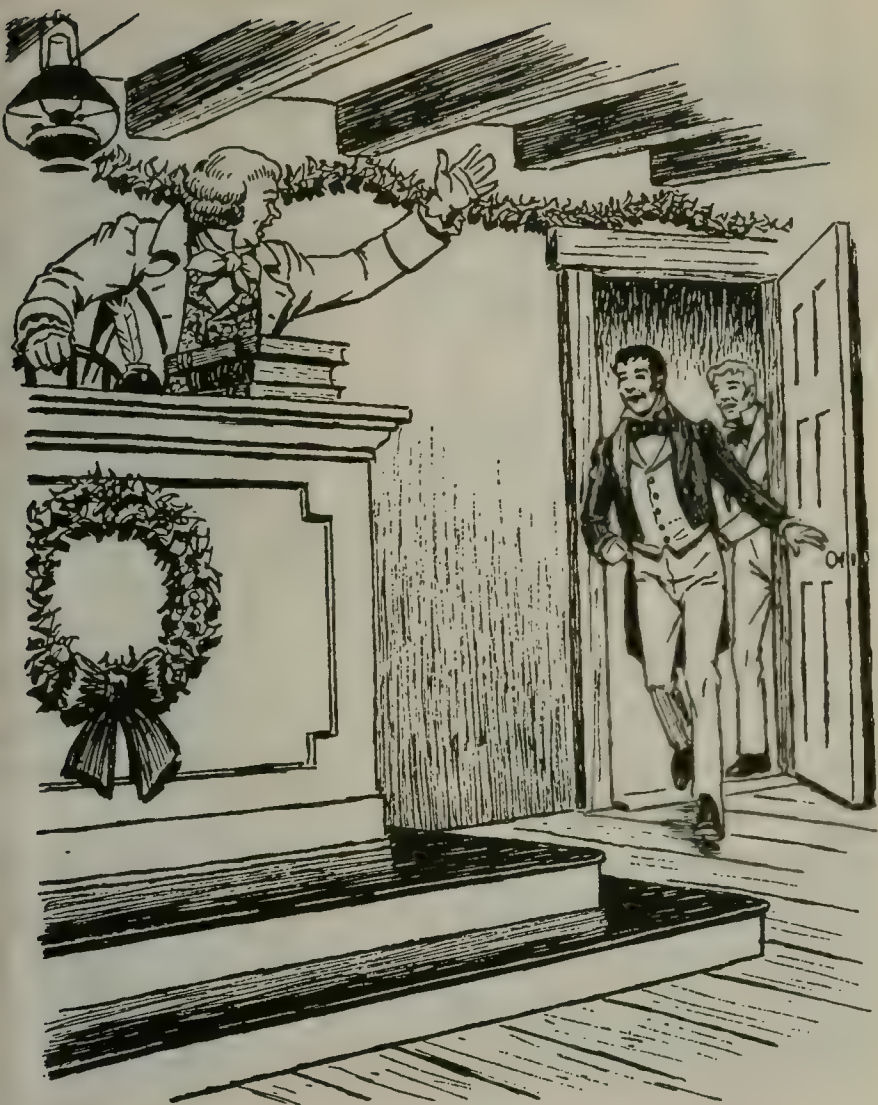
They went inside and saw an old gentleman sitting on a high stool. It was so high that if it had been two inches taller, the man's head would have hit the ceiling.

"Why, it's old Fezziwig!" cried Scrooge with excitement. "Bless his heart!"

Old Fezziwig laid down his pen and looked up at the clock. Seeing that it was seven, he called out in his jovial voice, "Yo ho, there! Ebenezer! Dick!"

Scrooge's former self, now a grown young man, hurried into the room, followed by his fellow apprentice.

"It's Dick Wilkins, to be sure!" cried Scrooge to the Ghost. "He was very close to



"Yo Ho, There! Ebenezer! Dick!"

A Christmas Carol

me. Wilkins was my good friend."

"Yo, ho, my boys!" cried Fezziwig. "No more work tonight. It's Christmas Eve, my lads! Let's clear away and have lots of room here!" And he skipped down in a single hop from his high desk.

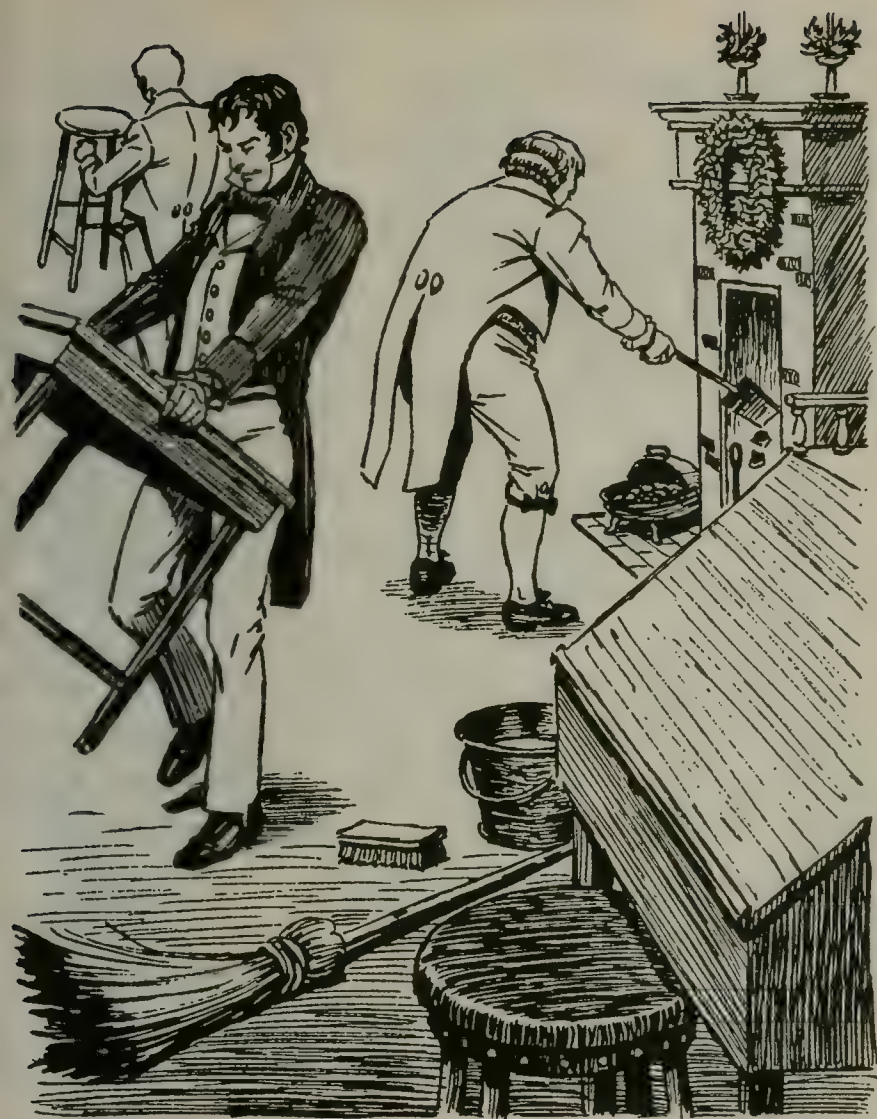
Ebenezer and Dick cleared away the desks and swept and washed the floor, while Mr. Fezziwig heaped more coals on the fire. The warehouse was soon snug, warm, and dry, and bright as a party room.

In came a fiddler, with a music book in hand. When he began to play, his music sounded like fifty stomach aches, but to the boys it was a beautiful orchestra.

In came Mrs. Fezziwig, smiling, followed by the three lovable Miss Fezziwigs and the young men courting them.

In came the men and women who worked in Mr. Fezziwig's warehouse.

In came the housemaid, with her cousin,



Preparing the Warehouse for a Party

A Christmas Carol

the baker.

In came the cook and her friend, the milkman.

In came friends and in came neighbors.

In they all came, one after another—some shyly, some boldly; some gracefully, some clumsily. And, arms about each other, they frolicked and danced to the fiddler's music.

There were cakes and puddings and mince pies and cold beef. And there was hot wine and lots of cold beer.

But the high point of the evening came when Mr. Fezziwig stood up to dance with Mrs. Fezziwig. Despite their age and size, their feet seemed to float on air, as they danced more gracefully and with more energy than couples half their age.

When the clock struck eleven, the party broke up. Mr. and Mrs. Fezziwig stood at the door, shaking hands with each of their guests and wishing them all a Merry Christmas as they left.



Mr. and Mrs. Fezziwig Dance.

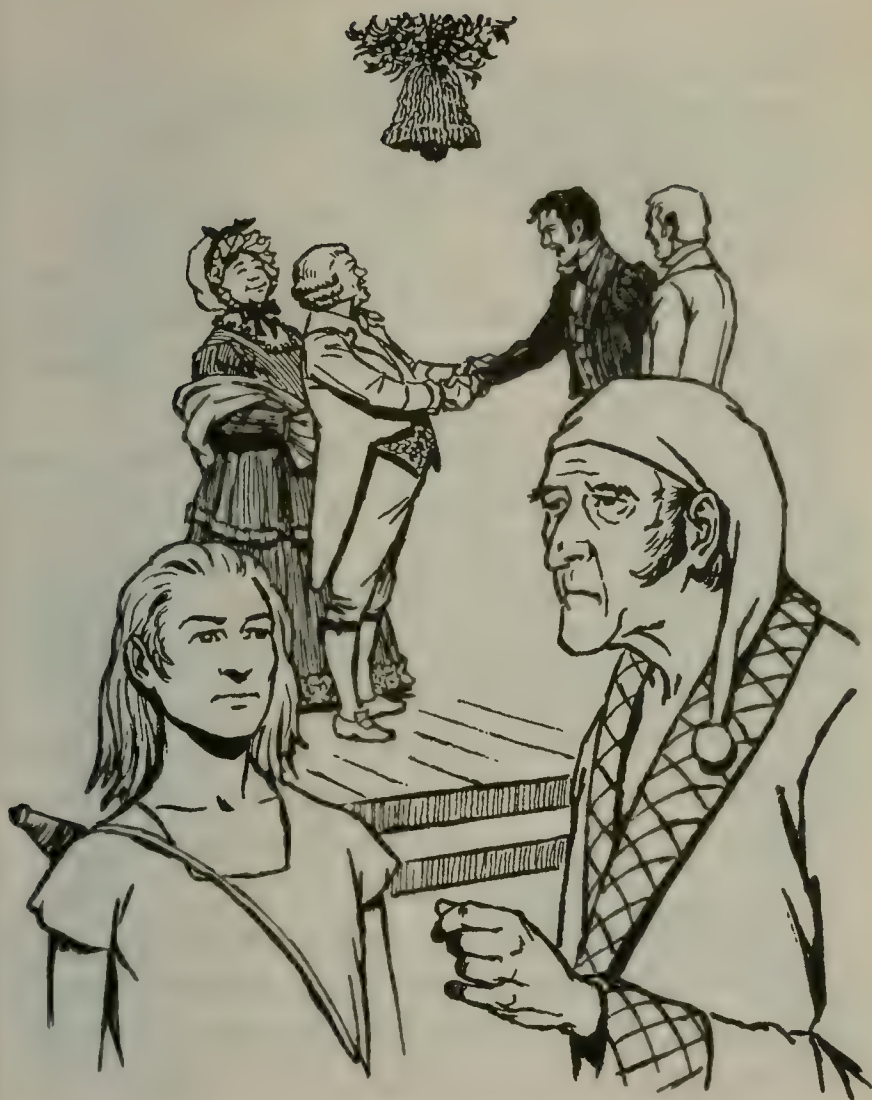
A Christmas Carol

When all the guest had gone, the Fezziwigs wished the same Merry Christmas to their two apprentices, and the boys headed for their beds in the back room of the warehouse full of praise for the Fezziwig's.

All the while this party scene was taking place, Scrooge watched and acted as if he were part of it as it was happening. He slapped his hands to the music, licked his lips at the food, nodded happily to the guests, and even held out his hand to say farewell to the Fezziwigs.

"It cost so little," said the Ghost, "to make so many people happy at that party. Fezziwig spent a few pounds—three or four perhaps. Do you really think he deserves all the praise the boys heaped on him?"

"It isn't that," said Scrooge, speaking more like his younger, former self. "Fezziwig has the power to make us happy or unhappy, to make our work a pleasure or a burden. No, Spirit, the happiness Fezziwig gives is as



Hearing the Boys Thank the Fezziwigs

A Christmas Carol

great as if it cost a fortune.”

Realizing that the Ghost was staring at him, Scrooge stopped talking.

“What is the matter?” asked the Ghost.

“Nothing, particularly,” answered Scrooge. “I was just thinking that I would like to say a kind word or two to my clerk, Bob Cratchit, right now.”

But at that moment, Scrooge and the Ghost once again stood side by side in another room. And Scrooge now saw himself as an older man—in his twenties, perhaps, in the prime of his life. But already his face had begun to show the signs of greed and worry. Now Scrooge was not alone. He sat alongside a pretty young girl. Tears were in her eyes as she spoke to Scrooge’s former self.

“It doesn’t matter to you at all,” she said softly, “that another love has replaced me in your heart. And if this love can cheer you and comfort you in the future as I would have



"Another Love Has Replaced Me."

A Christmas Carol

done, then I will not weep and grieve for you."

"Good Heavens, Bell! What love are you talking about?" asked Scrooge. "What love do you say has replaced you in my heart?"

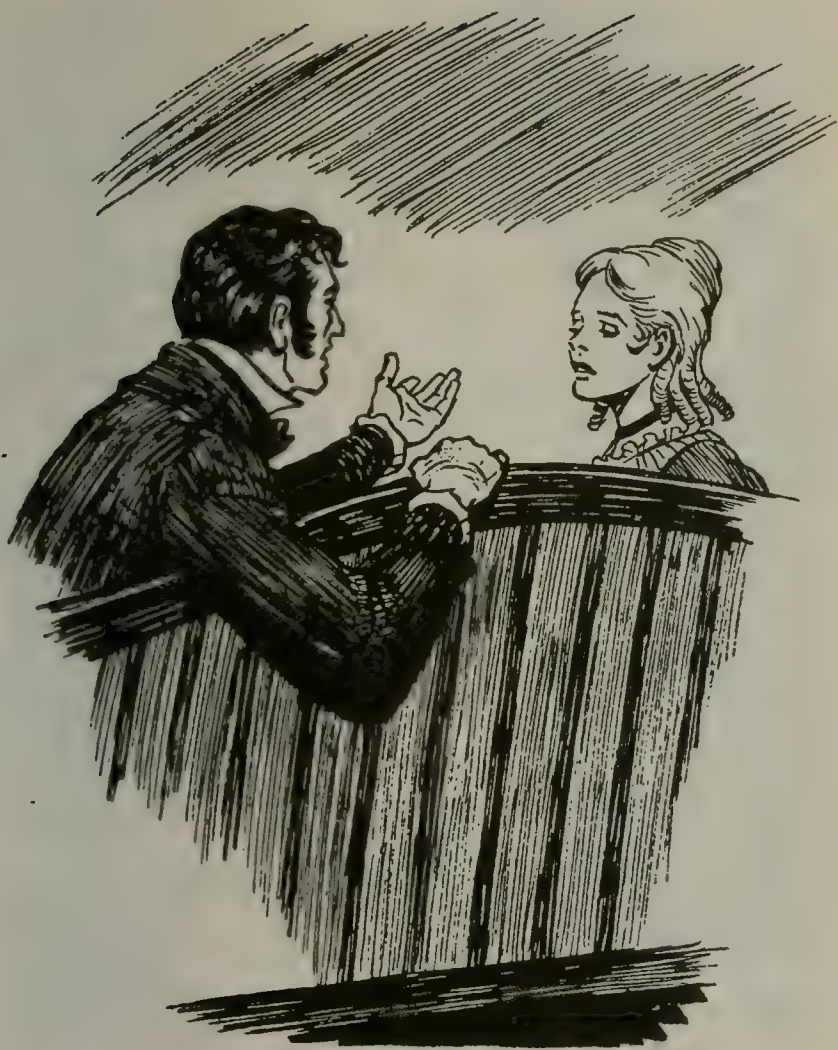
"Gold," she whispered. "For now gold is the only thing you love."

"But this is how the world is," said Scrooge. "Nothing is worse than poverty, yet these very same poor people condemn those who seek wealth."

"But, Ebenezer," protested Bell, "once you had more noble goals in life—goals which you have cast aside so you could concentrate only on gaining money."

"But my feelings toward you have not changed!" cried the young man.

"We pledged our love a long time ago when we were both poor," she reminded him. "And we agreed to wait until our financial situation improved. When you made the pledge, you were a different man. You have changed, Ebenezer."



"My Feelings Have Not Changed!"

A Christmas Carol

"I was a boy then!" he said impatiently. "We all change in some ways."

"But I have not changed," she said sadly, "and so I am releasing you from your promise to marry me."

"I never asked you to do that," he said.

"In words, no," she replied. "But in your changed attitudes, in your changed goals in life, you have asked me that very thing. . . Tell me, Ebenezer, if we hadn't known each other all these years, would you now seek me for a wife—me, a poor girl with no dowry?"

Scrooge did not reply.

"No, Ebenezer, you would have nothing to gain by marrying me—no gold to make you richer. This is why, because of the Ebenezer Scrooge I once loved, that I now release you from your promise."

The young man started to speak, but the girl turned away from him and continued to speak. "This may cause you some pain for a brief time, but you will forget me just as you



Bell Releases Ebenezer from His Promise.

A Christmas Carol

forget a bad dream. May you be happy in the life you have chosen!"

And she stood up and walked away.

"Ghost!" cried Scrooge. "Do not torture me any more! Take me home!"

"Just one more shadow," said the Ghost.

"No more!" cried Scrooge. "No more! I don't want to see any more."

But the Ghost grasped Scrooge's arms and forced him to gaze upon the scene that was appearing before them.

They were inside a room—not a large luxurious room, but a comfortable one, with a cheerful fire burning in the hearth. Next to the fire sat a beautiful girl who looked much like the girl in the last scene that Scrooge believed that it was the same one. . . until he saw *her*, Bell, now an attractive matron, sitting opposite her daughter.

The noise in this room was deafening, for



Bell's Happy Family

A Christmas Carol

there were more children than Scrooge could count. But neither mother nor daughter seemed to be bothered about the noise; in fact, they seemed to be enjoying it. . . even to joining in the children's games.

Now a knocking was heard at the door and all the children rushed toward it, carrying the two laughing women along with them. They all greeted the father, who came home accompanied by a coachman loaded down with toys and Christmas presents.

The children shouted with wonder and delight as each gift was opened. And for a long while afterward, the mother and father beamed happily as the children played with their gifts. Then slowly, the tired children began to leave the parlor and go upstairs to bed.

And now Scrooge watched more closely as the father, with his daughter leaning lovingly on him, sat down with her and her mother at



Greeting Their Father

A Christmas Carol

the fireside. And when Scrooge thought how perhaps that beautiful young girl might have been *his* daughter. . . might have brought joy to *his* life, his eyes grew full with tears.

"Spirit!" cried Scrooge in a broken voice. "Take me away from here!"

"I told you these were shadows of things that are past," said the Ghost. "They are what they are. I did not make them happen."

"Take me away!" cried Scrooge. "I cannot bear it! Take me back! Stop haunting me!"

With that, Scrooge grabbed the cap hanging down the Ghost's back and quickly pressed it on its head, hoping that by putting out the Ghost's light, he could make it go away. But though Scrooge pressed the cap all the way down to the ground over the invisible figure, the light still shone from under it.

Scrooge felt exhausted and drowsy. Not sooner had he given the cap one last squeeze than he found himself in his own bedroom. He reeled into bed and fell into a heavy sleep.



Scrooge Tries To Put Out the Ghost's Light.



Scrooge Pushes Aside the Curtains.

CHAPTER 5

The Ghost of Christmas Present

Scrooge awakened in the middle of a loud snore. He sat up in bed to clear his head, realizing that the clock would soon be striking one. He knew that something inside him woke him up at that moment so he'd be awake to have his meeting with the second ghost.

Rather than wait and be surprised again by the ghost's opening one of his curtains, Scrooge pushed them all aside himself and lay down again to wait nervously.

"What will this one look like?" muttered Scrooge. "I'm sure I wouldn't be surprised by

A Christmas Carol

anything from a baby to a rhinoceros!"

So, prepared for almost anything, Scrooge was surprised when the clock struck one and no ghost appeared. As the minutes went by... five... ten... fifteen... and nothing came he began to tremble. As he lay there, a blaze of light began shining on his bed.

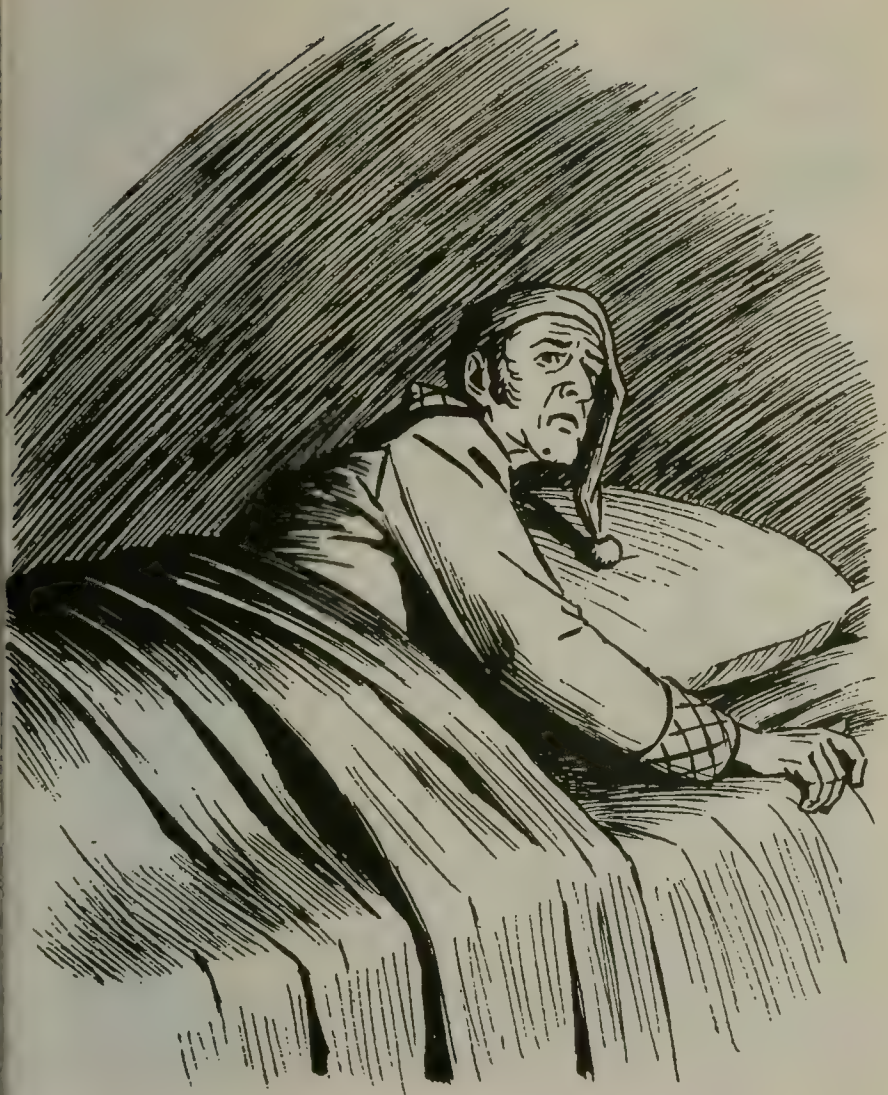
"Perhaps it's coming from the sitting room" thought Scrooge. "I'd better trace it."

So, getting up out of bed softly, Scrooge shuffled in his slippers to the door. The instant his hand touched the knob to turn it, a strange voice called his name.

"Ebenezer Scrooge, enter this room!"

Scrooge obeyed.

It was his own sitting-room, there was no doubt. But it had changed completely. Leaves and branches of holly, mistletoe, and ivy, all covered with berries, hung from the walls and ceiling. A roaring fire blazed in the hearth. And piled on the floor, forming a thronelike couch, were huge roasts of meat, turkeys, and



A Blaze of Light Shines on His Bed.

A Christmas Carol

suckling pigs.; long strings of sausages; and mince pies, plum puddings, apples, oranges, cakes, and bowls of punch.

Seated on this feast throne was a jolly, smiling giant. High above him he held a torch shaped like a Horn of Plenty.

"Come in!" called the Ghost warmly.

Scrooge entered timidly, his head bowed before the Ghost. Although the Ghost's eyes were friendly and kind, Scrooge did not want to meet them.

"Look at me!" said the Spirit. "I am the Ghost of Christmas Present."

Scrooge obeyed. What he saw was a figure dressed in a simple dark green robe trimmed with white fur. It hung loosely around the Spirit's body. Tied around his waist was an ancient rusty sheath, but no sword was in it. The Spirit's feet were bare below the robe. On his head was a holly wreath, set with shining icicles. Dark brown hair hung long and loosely from his head, framing a friendly



The Ghost of Christmas Present

A Christmas Carol

face, sparkling eyes, and a cheery voice.

"You have never seen anything like me before, have you?" asked the Spirit.

"Never," answered Scrooge. "But please, Good Spirit, take me wherever you wish. Last night I was forced to go with the first Spirit and I learned a valuable lesson. Tonight, if you have anything to teach me, I am ready."

"Touch my robe!" commanded the Spirit.

Scrooge obeyed and was instantly stuck to the robe.

And in that same instant, the holly, mistletoe, berries, meat, turkeys, pigs, sausages, pudding, fruit, and punch all vanished too. So did the room, the fire, the glowing light, and the night.

Scrooge and the Spirit now stood on the city streets on Christmas morning. The weather was cold and the sky gloomy. Snow covered everything—white on the rooftop, and gray and black in the road, where carts and wagons made deep burrows. Some people



"Touch My Robe!"

A Christmas Carol

were shoveling snow from the pavement and others were sweeping it from their roofs, much to the delight of children who watched as rooftop snowstorms fell in the road. Even the people on the roofs were having a jolly time calling to each other and even throwing a snowball or two at each other.

The fruit shop was open and baskets of chestnuts and almonds sat at the door. Apples and pears and oranges were piled high in pyramids, and bunches of grapes dangled from hooks to entice last-minute holiday shoppers.

From the grocer's shop came delicious scents of tea and coffee, of cinnamon and sugar and spices.

The poultry shops were still open, with juicy turkeys, squabs, and geese begging to be carried home and eaten for dinner.

Soon the steeple bell called all the good people to church, and the street was filled with them, in their best clothes and their gayest



A Jolly Time in the Snow

A Christmas Carol

faces. At the same time, from every street and lane came scores of poor people, carrying their dinners to the bakers' shops, for on this day each baker welcomed the poor into his shop to warm their Christmas dinner in his big oven.

As these poor people passed the Spirit and Scrooge, the Spirit lifted the cover of each man's dish and sprinkled incense from his torch on it. But what a strange torch it was. For once or twice when two dinner-carriers bumped into each other and exchanged angry words, the Spirit sprinkled a few drops of water from his torch onto them, and their good spirits returned immediately.

"Is there a particular flavor that you sprinkle from your torch?" asked Scrooge.

"Yes," answered the Spirit. "My own."

"Can that flavor be added to any dinner today?"

"To any," said the Spirit. "But mostly to a poor dinner, for that's the dinner that needs it most."

They continued on, invisible, to the outside



The Spirit Sprinkles Incense.

A Christmas Carol

of town and arrived at the home of Scrooge's clerk, Bob Cratchit. The Spirit stopped at the doorway and blessed the small house with a sprinkling of his torch.

Inside, Mrs. Cratchit, Bob's wife, was setting the table. Her often-mended but clean dress was tied with colorful holiday ribbons. One of her daughters, Belinda, was helping her, while her son, Peter, was dipping a fork into a pan of potatoes to see if they were done.

Two smaller Cratchits, a boy and a girl, came tearing into the room.

"What a delicious smell our noses caught outside the baker's!" cried the boy excitedly.

"It must be our Christmas goose!" added the girl. "I just know it was."

"Where can your dear father be?" asked Mrs. Cratchit. "And your brother, Tiny Tim? They should have been home from church by now. And even your sister Martha is a half-hour late getting here."



The Cratchits Prepare Christmas Dinner.

A Christmas Carol

"I'm here, Mother," called a voice at the doorway.

"Bless your heart, dear Martha!" said Mrs. Cratchit, kissing her and taking off her bonnet and shawl. "But how late you are! Was there anything wrong at the milliner's shop?"

"We had a good deal of work to finish last night," said Martha, "and all the apprentices had to clear away this morning."

"Well, it doesn't matter," said Mrs. Cratchit, "as long as you're here. Now sit by the fire and warm up."

"No, no! Father's coming!" cried the two young Cratchits. "Hide, Martha, hide!"

Martha hid behind a closet door, and in came Bob, his threadbare clothes darned but clean. On his shoulders was Tiny Tim, carrying his crutch in the hand that wasn't holding onto his father's neck.

"Why, where's our Martha?" cried Bob, looking around at his family.

"Not coming," said his wife solemnly.



Martha Hides.

A Christmas Carol

"Not coming?" said Bob, suddenly losing his gay spirit. "Not coming home on Christmas Day?"

Martha hated to see her father so disappointed, so she ran out from behind the door and into his arms, while the two Cratchit boys gently eased Tiny Tim down off his father's shoulders and helped him into the kitchen to check on the pudding on the stove.

"And how did little Tiny Tim behave in church?" asked Mrs. Cratchit.

"As good as gold," said Bob. "Sometimes that boy gets the strangest thoughts though! But I guess it's from being alone so much while other children his age are out playing together."

"Why, what were his thoughts, dear?" asked Mrs. Cratchet.

"On the way home from church he told me that he hoped people saw him in church because he was a cripple. When I asked him why, he said it would remind people that on



A Happy Reunion

A Christmas Carol

Christmas Day they should remember their God who made lame beggars walk and blind men see." Bob's voice trembled as he told this to his wife.

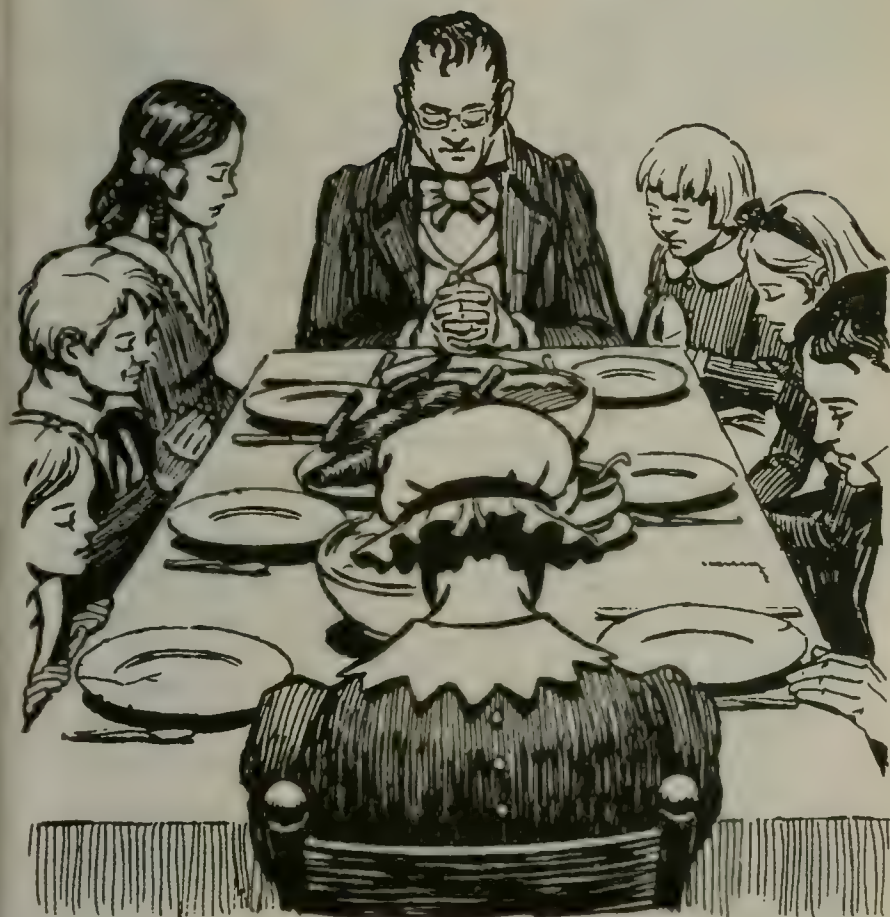
Just then, a noisy little crutch was heard on the floor and in came Tiny Tim. His brother and sister helped him get up on his stool by the fire.

Peter and the two young Cratchits then went to bring in the goose and returned in a procession with it. Mrs. Cratchit brought the gravy, while Peter mashed the potatoes, Belinda sweetened the applesauce, and Martha heated the plates.

Bob pulled Tiny Tim's stool to the corner beside him at the table, while the two young Cratchits brought chairs around for everyone.

At last, the family was seated and grace was said.

There was never such a goose—everyone agreed while Mrs. Cratchit was carving. Even though the goose was quite small for



The Family Says Grace.

A Christmas Carol

such a large family, the dinner was filled in with potatoes and applesauce, and not a single morsel was left over.

As Belinda took away the plates, Mrs. Cratchit went to get the pudding.

"Suppose it falls apart?" worried the young Cratchit boy.

"Suppose someone came in and stole it?" said the girl. "That would be worse!"

But in half a minute, Mrs. Cratchit entered, smiling proudly as she held the flaming pudding decorated with a twig of holly on top.

"My dear," said Bob, "this is the best pudding you have made since our marriage."

"I was so worried," she said, sighing with relief. "I wasn't sure it would come out right, for I didn't have enough flour."

Everyone said the pudding was wonderful and not one person mentioned what a small pudding it was for such a large family.

Then all the family gathered in a circle around the hearth. On a small table at Bob's



A Flaming Christmas Pudding

A Christmas Carol

elbow stood all the glasses the family possessed—two tumblers and a cup without a handle. These were filled with a hot mixture of gin and lemons, but it could not have tasted any better if it were served in golden goblets.

As Bob served it, he proposed a toast. "A Merry Christmas to us all, my dears. God bless us!"

The family repeated the toast with Tiny Tim the last of all—"God bless us, everyone!"

Tiny Tim sat very close to his father's side on his little stool. Bob held the boy's withered little hand in his, holding it gently yet tightly, as if he feared that the boy might be taken away from him.

"Spirit," said Scrooge, becoming interested as he had never been before, "tell me if Tiny Tim will live."

"I see an empty stool in the corner and a crutch without an owner. If these shadows of the future, which only I can see, remain



"A Merry Christmas To Us All."

A Christmas Carol

unchanged, that is Tiny Tim's fate!"

"No, no!" cried Scrooge. "Oh, no, kind spirit! Spare him!"

"If these shadows remain unchanged," repeated the Spirit, "he will die. . . . But why not? After all, you said it would be better if these poor unfortunate creatures died off and decreased the population. You said it yourself. Those were your very words!"

Scrooge hung his head upon hearing the words he had spoken to the two visitors to his warehouse, upon hearing these very same words spoken back to him.

"Man," said the Ghost, "if you are a man in your heart, take back those wicked words. Why should you decide who shall live and who shall die? Perhaps, Heaven will decide that you are less fit to live than this poor man's child!"

Trembling, Scrooge could only stare at the ground, but the sound of his name being called from the shadows caused him to look up.



Scrooge Hears of Tiny Tim's Fate.

A Christmas Carol

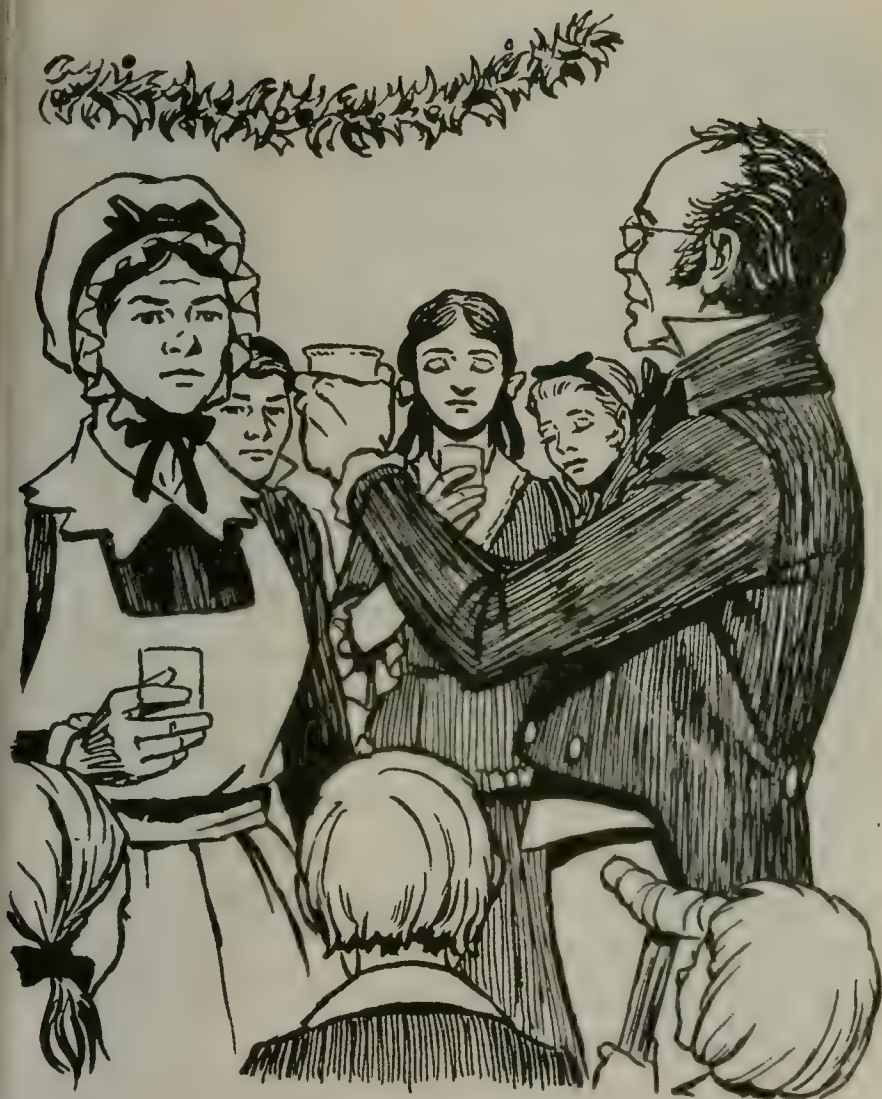
"To Mr. Scrooge!" said Bob, raising his tumbler for another toast. "To Mr. Scrooge, who made this feast possible!"

"Mr. Scrooge, indeed!" cried Mrs. Cratchit angrily. "If I had him here, I'd give him a piece of my mind to feast on. Why, Robert, nobody knows better than you what a stingy, hard, hateful, unfeeling old man Mr. Scrooge is!"

"My dear," said Bob calmly, "it is Christmas Day."

"Well," admitted his wife grudgingly, "I'll drink to his health for your sake, Robert, and for the sake of the holiday spirit. But never for Mr. Scrooge's sake!... Long life to Mr. Scrooge! I'm sure he's having a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year."

The children joined in the toast to Scrooge too, but no one in the family seemed to take much pleasure in doing it. The name of Scrooge darkened everyone's party spirit for a full five minutes. But when it passed, they all



Bob Toasts Mr. Scrooge.

A Christmas Carol

returned to their merry selves, for the Cratchits were a happy family, grateful for what they *did* have and content with each other.

As the scene of the Cratchit family faded into the shadows, Scrooge kept his eyes fixed on Tiny Tim until the last.

As Scrooge and the Spirit went along the streets back to town, it was getting dark and the snow was falling heavily.

The brightness of roaring fires shone from all the windows they passed, with scenes of holiday preparations being made in each house. Ahead of them, children were running out their doors into the snow to greet married sisters, brothers, cousins, uncles, and aunts, and to welcome them to dinner. Guests such as these were entering all the houses along the way.

How the Ghost beamed at the sight of these happy people!

On they went, farther outside town.



Watching Visitors Arrive

A Christmas Carol

Then, suddenly, without a word of warning from the Ghost, Scrooge saw that they had arrived on a bleak and deserted moor. Giant boulders lay on the ground amid frozen moss and coarse grass. In the West, the setting sun shone its last streak of red, while the rest of the sky was filled with the darkest night.

“What kind of place is this?” asked Scrooge.

“A place where miners live,” said the Spirit. “These men may labor deep inside the earth, but they still know me. They know the Spirit of Christmas Present! See!” And he pointed to the lighted window of a hut.

Scrooge and the Ghost walked quickly towards it. Passing their invisible selves through the wall of mud and stone, they found a cheerful group around a glowing fire. An old, old man and woman, and their children, their grandchildren and their great-grandchildren, were all decked out in their holiday clothes singing Christmas songs.



A Mining Family Sings Christmas Songs.

A Christmas Carol

The Spirit did not delay here—only long enough for Scrooge to see that here, too, was the spirit of Christmas!

“Take hold of my robe,” the Spirit told Scrooge. And they left the house and then the moor. . . high *above* the moor.

Scrooge looked down and back, horrified. “Where are we going?” he cried, as he saw only the roaring sea below and ahead of them.

Then, ahead, on a reef of sunken rocks several miles from shore, stood a lone lighthouse. But even here, the two lighthouse-keepers were sitting at a rough table near a fire, wishing each other a Merry Christmas, while celebrating with their mug of grog.

Again the Spirit and Scrooge sped on, above the black and heaving sea, until they landed on the deck of a ship beside the helmsman at the wheel. The officers and crew were all at their stations, but each man was either humming a Christmas song, or had a Christmas thought, or was talking to his companions



Visiting a Lighthouse

A Christmas Carol

about other Christmases at home.

Then, suddenly, these low voices were interrupted by a hearty laugh. It was with great surprise that Scrooge recognized it as his Nephew's laugh, and it was with even greater surprise that Scrooge found himself in a bright room, with the Spirit at his side.

"Ha, ha!" laughed Scrooge's nephew, Fred. "Ha, ha, ha!" As he laughed, he was rolling his head and making the funniest of faces.

Fred's wife, a pretty young thing with a dimpled face, was laughing too, just as heartily as her husband. And so were their friends, gathered for the holiday at their home.

"And he said," Fred went on, "... he said that Christmas was a humbug! And he believed it too!"

"Shame on him!" said Fred's wife, who was Scrooge's niece by marriage.

"Oh, I don't know," said Fred. "He's a funny



Fred and His Wife Laugh.

A Christmas Carol

old fellow. True, he could be more pleasant, but I have nothing against him."

"You've told me he's very rich," she said.

"What of it, my dear? His wealth is of no use to him. He doesn't do any good with it. He doesn't use it to live comfortably, and he doesn't even have the enjoyment of knowing he is ever going to do any good for us with it."

"Well, I have no patience with him," said the niece. And all the ladies present agreed.

"Oh, I have patience!" said Fred. "I feel sorry for him. I couldn't be angry with him even if I tried. After all, who really suffers by his unpleasant ways? Himself, always. Here's the perfect example. He decided he didn't like us, and so refused our invitation to Christmas dinner. And what's the result? He lost out on a very good dinner. See—it *is* he who suffers."

"Yes, yes!" cried Fred's wife, clapping her hands. "Do go on, Fred."

"I was only going to add that Scrooge missed out on some very pleasant hours and



Discussing Uncle Scrooge

A Christmas Carol

some very pleasant company, and he can't find those in his moldy old office or gloomy apartment. Still, my dear, I plan to invite him every year, whether he likes it or not, for I pity him. He may continue to criticize Christmas as long as he lives, but if I keep going there year after year, in good spirits, who knows—he might even give poor Bob Cratchit a Christmas gift of fifty pounds one day!"

Everyone laughed at that idea, but they laughed, too, because of the good-natured spirit of the holiday.

After tea, the group turned to music. Fred's wife played the harp and everyone sang—a simple little tune which touched Scrooge deeply as he listened, for it was the favorite song years ago of his sister, Fan.

Alphabet games and quiz games followed, with all the guests, young and old, joining in.

For that matter, so did Scrooge, who was so interested that he forgot for the moment



Scrooge Hears an Old, Familiar Song.

A Christmas Carol

that his voice could not be heard as he called out answers to the quizzes.

The Ghost was pleased to see Scrooge like this, but it was now time to go.

"Please," begged Scrooge, "let me stay for just one more game!"

The game was "Yes and No." Fred had to think of something or someone, and the guests had to guess what or who by asking questions that could only be answered by yes or no.

"Yes, it is an animal," answered Fred to the first question. "Yes, a live animal. . . . Yes, a rather disagreeable animal. . . . Yes, a savage animal. . . . Yes, an animal that growled and grunted. . . . Yes, an animal that even talked sometimes. . . . Yes, it lived in London and walked about the streets. . . . No, it wasn't in a show. . . . No, it wasn't led by anybody. . . . No, it didn't live in a menagerie. . . . No, it was never killed in a market. . . . No, it wasn't a horse. . . or a cow. . . or a bull. . . or a



Playing "Yes and No"

A Christmas Carol

tiger. . . or a dog. . . or a hog. . . or a cat. . . or a bear."

With each question, Fred burst into a fresh roar of laughter. He was so delighted and laughed so hard that he had to get up from the sofa and stamp his feet.

At last, one of the ladies, roaring with laughter herself, cried out, "I know what it is, Fred! I've guessed it!"

"What is it?" asked Fred.

"It's your uncle Scro—oo—oge!"

And she was correct!

"But you should have said 'yes' to 'Is it a bear?" one of the guests said to Fred.

"Well, now, my friends," said Fred, "now that Uncle Scrooge has helped us have such a merry time, we must drink a toast to his health!" And lifting his glass, Fred cried, "To Uncle Scrooge!"

"To Uncle Scrooge!" cried the guests. "To Uncle Scrooge's health!"

"A Merry Christmas and a Happy New



"I've Guessed It!"

A Christmas Carol

Year to the old man, wherever he is! added Fred. "He wouldn't take these wishes from me in person, but now he has them, nevertheless. To Uncle Scrooge!"

Uncle Scrooge had become so light-hearted that he was about to thank the guests for their fine toast and wish them a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year in return. But the Spirit did not give him time. For the entire scene passed away as Scrooge's nephew was uttering his last words. And Scrooge and the Spirit were once again on their way.

They traveled far and they saw much. They visited many homes. They stood beside sick beds suddenly made cheerful for reasons that people couldn't explain. They saw poverty and misery in workhouses, hospitals, and jails, but they left each scene with people a little richer and a little happier with the Spirit's blessings.

It was a long night. What was strange,



“To Uncle Scrooge!”

A Christmas Carol

however, was that while Scrooge did not change in appearance, the Ghost seemed to grow older and older. Scrooge noticed this as the night wore on.

"Are Spirits' lives so short?" he asked.

"My life on earth is very short," said the Ghost. "It ends tonight."

"Tonight at midnight!" answered the Spirit. "Listen now, for my time is drawing near. You must beware of Ignorance and Greed, for they mean DOOM to all mankind . . . unless you and all mankind can change it."

The clock began to strike the hour of twelve.

Scrooge looked around him for the Spirit, but it had gone. As the last stroke resounded, Scrooge remembered Marley's prediction of the third ghost's arrival at the last stroke of midnight. And lifting his eyes, Scrooge saw before him a Phantom, draped and hooded, coming toward him!



The Spirit Gives Scrooge a Warning.



The Ghost of Christmas Yet To Come

CHAPTER 6

The Ghost of Christmas Yet to Come

The Phantom approached Scrooge slowly, gravely. When it came near, it seemed to bring gloom and mystery into the air. The Phantom's body was covered with a dark black robe, which hid its face and its body, and left nothing visible except one outstretched hand.

Scrooge dropped to his knees, but continued staring at the tall, stately Phantom as it stood beside him, speaking not a word!

"Am I in the presence of the Ghost of Christmas Yet To Come?" asked Scrooge.

The Spirit did not answer, but pointed

A Christmas Carol

onward with its hand.

"You are about to show me shadows of things which have not happened yet, but which will happen in the future. Is that correct?" asked Scrooge.

The upper part of the robe that covered the area of the Spirit's head seemed to nod. But this was the only answer it gave Scrooge.

Although he was accustomed to ghostly company by this time, Scrooge was so frightened of the silent shape that his legs trembled beneath him and he could barely stand when he tried to follow the Spirit as it moved onward.

"Oh, Ghost of the Future!" he cried. "I fear you more than any ghost I have ever seen. But I know your purpose is to do good for me. And since I hope to live to be a better man than I was, I am prepared to go with you, and go gratefully. Will you not speak to me?"

The Ghost gave no reply. Its hand was its only answer as it pointed straight ahead.



The Ghost Points Straight Ahead.

A Christmas Carol

"Lead on!" said Scrooge. "The night is passing quickly and the time is precious to me. Lead on, Spirit!"

The Phantom moved away as silently as it had come. Scrooge followed behind its black robe, which seemed to lift him up and carry him along.

The city seemed to spring up all around them—merchants hurrying up and down the streets, talking in groups, looking at their watches, as Scrooge had often seen them do.

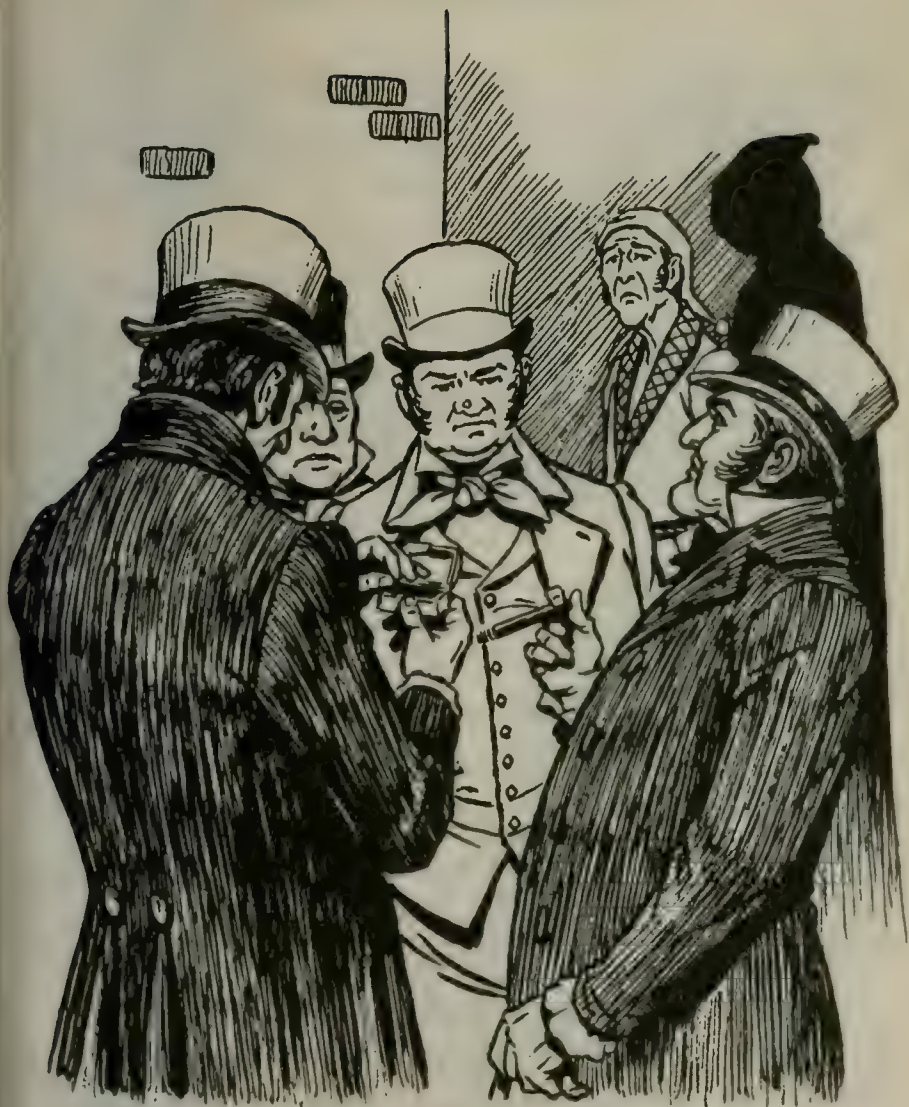
The Spirit stopped beside one little group of business men and pointed its hand toward them. Scrooge walked closer to listen to their conversation.

"No," said a big, fat man with a monstrous chin. "I don't know much about it. I only know he's dead."

"When did he die?" asked another.

"Last night, I believe."

"What was the matter with him?" asked a



Scrooge Listens to a Conversation.

A Christmas Carol

third, taking a pinch of snuff out of a very large snuff box. "I thought he'd never die!"

"God only knows what was the matter," said the first man, with a yawn.

"What did he do with his money?" asked a red-faced gentleman with a huge wart on the end of his nose.

"I haven't heard," said the man with the large chin, yawning again. "He probably left it to his company. He hasn't left it to *me*—that much I know!"

At that remark, the group laughed.

"It's probably going to be a cheap funeral," continued the same speaker, "for I certainly don't know of anybody who'd want to go to it. Do you think we should volunteer?"

"I wouldn't mind going if a lunch was served," said the man with a wart. "But I must be fed if I volunteer, especially for *him*!"

Again the group laughed.

"Well," said the first speaker, "I never wear black funeral gloves and I never eat lunch.



The Group Laughs.

A Christmas Carol

But I'll go if any of you do. As a matter of fact, I probably was his only friend, for I was the only one who stopped and spoke to him when we met on the street."

With that, the group broke up, with each gentleman strolling away and joining other groups.

Scrooge looked at the Spirit, surprised that it should have considered such a trivial conversation so important for him to hear.

"But perhaps," Scrooge said to himself, "the Spirit had some hidden purpose. Could the men have been talking about Marley's death? . . . No, that was in the past and this Ghost is the Future. . . . Did I know anybody close to me that could have been the subject of those gentlemen's conversation? . . . No. Well, I'll simply remember all that I have heard," he decided, "and perhaps when I see myself in some of these future shadows, that will give me a clue to why the Spirit had me



Scrooge Is Puzzled.

A Christmas Carol

listen to that conversation.”

Scrooge looked about on the street corner and spotted the accustomed place where he had always stood at that time of day. But he couldn't find an image of himself in the crowds. Still, he wasn't surprised, for by now Ebenezer Scrooge had already been making plans to change his entire way of living. “Perhaps,” he reasoned, “my not being among these crowds is a sign that I am elsewhere, making a better life for myself.”

Then they left the busy business section of the city and went into a remote part of town where Scrooge had never been before. This section had a bad reputation; its narrow streets were dirty and smelly; its shops and houses were broken down; and its people were ugly, drunk, and in rags. The whole section smelled of crime, filth, and misery.

Along one of the narrow streets was a shop that jutted out from the others. From a window Scrooge could see piles and piles of rusty



A Filthy, Miserable Section of Town

A Christmas Carol

keys, chains, hinges, files, scales, weights, and junk iron of all kinds scattered all over the floor. Mountains of dirty rags were heaped everywhere and boxes of bones and animals' insides were crowded together.

Sitting by a charcoal fire among the wares he sold was the owner of the shop—a gray-haired rascal, almost seventy years old. He had hung a curtain of dirty rags on a rope to shield himself from the cold air in the shop. But neither the dirt of the shop nor the cold air seemed to bother him as he sat smoking his pipe luxuriously.

Scrooge and the Phantom entered through the wall just as an old, haggard charwoman came in the door dragging a heavy bundle. She was followed by another woman, also with a bundle, and a man in black. The three were startled to meet there, but they obviously knew each other well, for they all burst into laughter when they got over their surprise.

"I'm first," said the charwoman to Old Joe,



Entering the Junk Shop with Bundles

A Christmas Carol

the shopkeeper. "I was the first to enter the shop. The laundress, there, is second, and the undertaker's helper is third. Now, tell me, Joe, isn't this a coincidence—the three of us meeting here without planning it?"

"Old friends couldn't have met in a better place," said Joe, taking the pipe out of his mouth. "Now, let's all go into the parlor."

The parlor was the screened-off space behind the curtain of rags. Old Joe stirred the coals in the fire with an old stair post, then turned to his customers.

The charwoman threw her bundle on the floor and sat down on a stool, looking defiantly at the other two who had followed her in.

"So you know that I didn't get the goods in this bundle as a gift, don't you, Mrs. Dilbur?" said the charwoman to the laundress.

"Ha!" said Mrs. Dilbur with a sneer.

"Well, every person's got a right to take things," said the charwoman haughtily, "especially when it's to take care of herself."



Old Joe Stirs the Fire

A Christmas Carol

After all, I used to clean and scrub his place. And *him* that I took this stuff from always took care of himself. And *he* won't miss any of it."

"That's true," said the laundress. "I knew him; I did his laundry. And *he* always did make sure to take care of himself . . . never of others."

"And besides," added the charwoman, "who's going to know? *We're* not going to tell on each other."

"No, indeed!" said Mrs. Dilbur and the undertaker's helper together.

"Very well, then!" cried the charwoman. "That's enough. A dead man won't need this stuff."

"No, indeed!" said Mrs. Dilbur, laughing.

"Besides," continued the charwoman, "If he wanted to keep 'em after he was dead, he should have been a better man during his lifetime. If he was, he'd have had somebody to look after him while he was dying, instead



“A Dead Man Won’t Need This Stuff.”

A Christmas Carol

of lying there, gasping out his last breath all alone."

"That's true," said Mrs. Dilbur. "This is his punishment—having all his belongings stolen."

"It would have been a worse punishment if I could have laid my hands on anything else," said the charwoman.

"All right now," said Old Joe. "Let's get down to business. I'll take the smallest bundle first."

The undertaker's helper opened his first. There wasn't much in it—a pencil case, a few buttons, and a brooch of little value.

Old Joe examined the loot carefully and noted the price he would pay for each on the wall. Then he added them up. "This is all I'll pay," he said, pointing to the total on the wall. "This . . . not another penny. Now, who's next?"

Mrs. Dilbur, the laundress, opened her bundle next. It contained sheets, towels, a



Old Joe Adds Up the Prices.

A Christmas Carol

few pieces of clothing, a pair of boots, and a pair of sugar tongs.

Joe added up their value on the wall the same way he did the undertaker's helper's loot and announced the total to Mrs. Dilbur. "I'm being very generous," he added. "I always have a weakness when I do business with ladies."

"Now undo *my* bundle, Joe," said the charwoman.

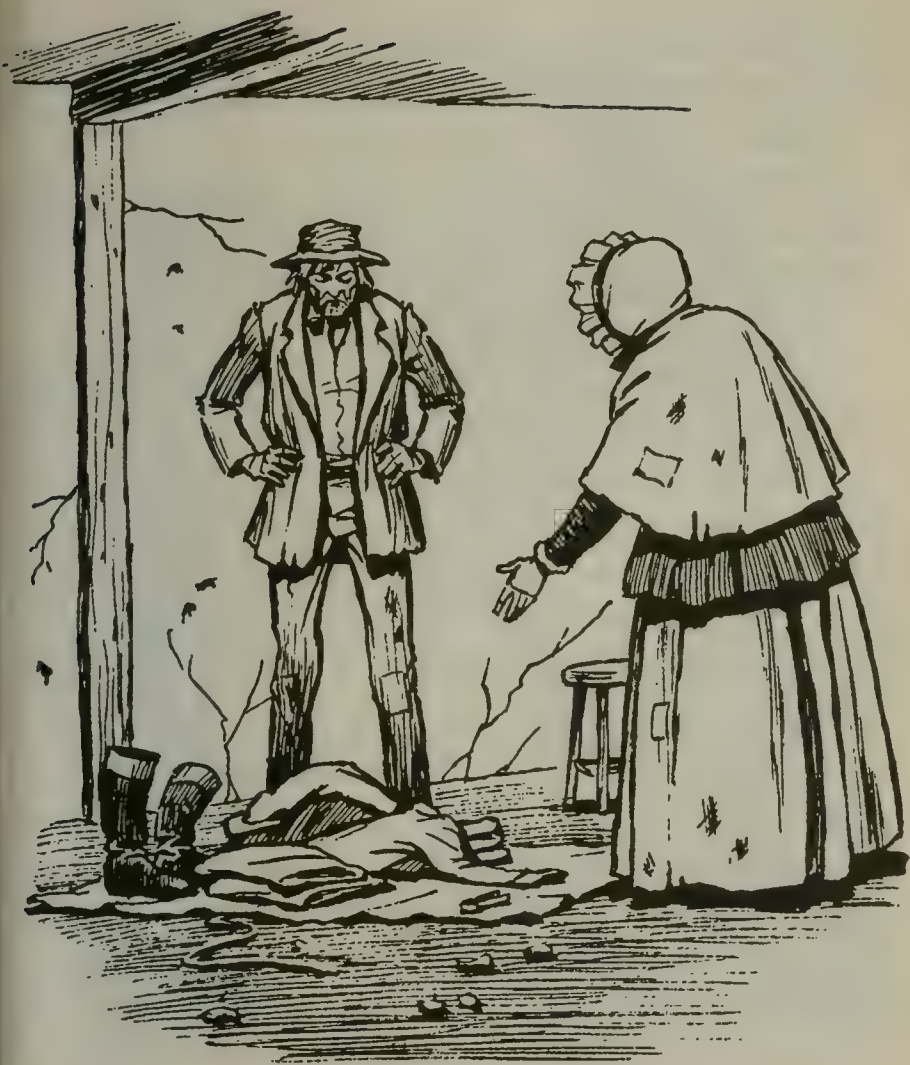
Joe got down on his knees and had to open a great many knots before he was able to lift out a large, heavy roll of some dark cloth.

"What are these?" he asked. "Bed-curtains?"

"Yes!" exclaimed the woman. "Bed-curtains!"

"Do you mean to say you took 'em down, rings and all, with him lying there?"

"Yes," replied the woman. "Why not? I'm certainly not going to keep my hands in my pockets if I can get something of value in them just



Mrs. Dilbur's Bundle

A Christmas Carol

by reaching out . . . especially from a man like *him*! Look, there! There's blankets too!"

"*His* blankets?" asked Joe.

"Who else's did you think?" she replied with a sneer. "He isn't likely to catch cold without them."

Everyone laughed at that!

Old Joe was now holding a man's finely woven silk shirt up to the light.

"You can look all you want to, Joe," said the charwoman. "Look till your eyes hurt. But you won't find a hole in that shirt, or a patch, or a worn spot. It was his best shirt . . . and it would have been wasted if it hadn't been for me."

"What do you mean 'wasted'?" asked Joe.

"Somebody had put it on him to be buried in," she said with a laugh. "That was a fool thing to do, so I took it off him and put on an old cotton one instead. His body looked just as good—or just as ugly—in the cotton one as it did in the fine silk one!"



"It Was His Best Shirt."

A Christmas Carol

When Old Joe handed her a flannel bag with money in it, the charwoman laughed. "Ha, ha! This is the result of his life, you see! He frightened us all away from him when he was alive, but we're making a profit on him now that he is dead! Ha, ha, ha!"

"Spirit!" cried Scrooge with a shudder. "This unhappy man they're talking about could have been me, for I have been leading just that kind of life they described. . . . But merciful Heavens! What is this?"

Scrooge drew back in terror, for the scene had changed. Now he was standing beside a bed—a bare bed with no curtains and no blankets. On the bed, beneath a ragged sheet, lay something very silent and unmoving. No one was in the room with the body to watch over it. . . to weep over it. . . or to care for it.

Scrooge glanced cautiously towards the Phantom. Its hand was pointing to the head of the body, as if telling Scrooge to lift the



The Phantom Points to the Head.

A Christmas Carol

ragged sheet and reveal the face. But Scrooge couldn't move. His arms seemed to have lost the power to raise even anything as light as the ragged sheet.

Scrooge looked up at the Phantom, his eyes filled with tears. "Spirit!" he cried. "I have learned a lesson in this fearful house of death . . . a lesson I shall never forget. Let us go now!"

But the Spirit did not move, only stood there with its finger pointed at the head beneath the sheet.

"I understand what you are telling me," said Scrooge. "I would uncover this face if I could. But my arms do not have the power to raise it."

The Phantom seemed to gaze at Scrooge from the blackness, but still it did not move.

"Please, Spirit, if there is any person in this town who feels *any* emotion over this man's death," cried Scrooge in agony, "show that person to me. I beg you!"



"I Have Learned a Lesson!"

A Christmas Carol

The Phantom spread its dark robe in front of Scrooge, and when it pulled the robe back, a mother and her small children appeared.

The mother seemed anxious, as if she was expecting someone, for she was pacing back and forth, glancing at the clock, stopping at the window, and jumping with each sound into the house.

Finally, the long-expected knock came, and she hurried to the door to let her husband in. He was a young man, though his face was troubled and weary.

His wife led him to a table set with his dinner and waited patiently for him to speak.

After a long silence, during which the young man did not even lift his fork, his wife finally forced herself to speak.

"Do you have news?" she asked.

The young man seemed embarrassed as to how to answer her. "Y-yes," he said quietly. "But it is bad."



An Anxious Mother Paces.

A Christmas Carol

"Are we ruined?" she asked fearfully.

"Not yet, Caroline," replied her husband.

"There is still a bit of hope."

"If *he* has agreed to extend our loan, then there is hope," she said. "But that would be a miracle to expect *him* to agree . . . Yet, has such a miracle happened?"

"He is past agreeing, my dear. He is dead!"

The young woman gasped—first thankful that *he* was dead . . . then praying forgiveness for her thoughts.

Her husband went on to explain. "I checked out everything today, for last night when I tried to see him to beg for a week's extension in making the payment, I met a drunken charwoman coming out of his apartment. When she told me that he was very ill—dying, in fact—I thought he was using that as an excuse to avoid me. But I found out this morning that what she told me was true. For *he* is dead."



“Are We Ruined?”

A Christmas Carol

"But what about our debt?" asked Caroline. "Will it be transferred to another person? And will we have to pay him?"

"I don't know," said the young man. "But before that happens, I'm certain that we'll have the money. And even if we do not, the person who takes over our debt would certainly have to be kinder than *he* was. No one could be as merciless as he was to us. So, my dear Caroline, we can sleep tonight with our hearts just a little bit lighter."

The hearts of the young couple were lighter and even their children, now quiet and trying to understand what their parents were saying, seemed more cheerful as they saw their parents finally smile. Yes, this was a happier house as a result of *that man's* death!

"Spirit," said Scrooge. "You have shown me a scene of pleasure at a man's death. Is there no one who still feels sorrow over death? Do people no longer mourn over death? I must



A Happier House

A Christmas Carol

see that people still do mourn over each other, or that terrible deathbed scene will remain with me forever.”

The Spirit led Scrooge through several familiar streets. As they went along, Scrooge looked all around, hoping to catch a glimpse of himself in this future world. But he was nowhere to be seen!

They stopped next at Bob Cratchit's house—a place Scrooge had visited with the Ghost of Christmas Present. Mrs. Cratchit and her daughters were seated around the fire, busy sewing on some coarse black cloth. Everyone was quiet. Even the noisy little Cratchits were as still as statues as they sat in one corner looking up at Master Peter, who was reading to them in very low tones.

As Scrooge and the Phantom crossed the threshold, Scrooge heard Peter's soft words, muffled with sobs.

“And he took a child, and set him in the



Everyone Is Quiet.

A Christmas Carol

midst of them.”

But the boy couldn't go on. He stopped reading, for his tears had all but choked him.

Mrs. Cratchit put down her sewing and covered her face with her hands. Through her tears, she tried to reassure her children, “It's the sewing, my dears. Sewing on this black cloth hurts my eyes.”

“Oh, no!” cried Scrooge. “Poor Tiny Tim! Is he . . .?”

And the Phantom seemed to nod from the blackness.

“My eyes are better now,” said Mrs. Cratchit to her children after a few moments. “You see, my dears, working by candlelight weakens them and makes them red. And I don't want your father to see them red when he comes home. He should be here shortly.”

“It's past time, Mother,” said Peter, shutting the book. “But Father has been walking



Mrs. Cratchit Is In Tears.

A Christmas Carol

slower these last few evenings... slower than he used to."

Then they were quiet again.

After several minutes, Mrs. Cratchit felt herself steadier, and in a more cheerful voice she said, "Why, I have seen your father walk very fast, even with... even with Tiny Tim on his shoulders."

"So have I!" cried Peter. "Often!"

"And so have I!" cried the other children.

"But Tiny Tim was very light to carry," continued Mrs. Cratchit as she picked up her sewing again. "And his father loved him so much that it was no trouble... no trouble... Oh, listen! Your father is at the door."

Mrs. Cratchit hurried out to meet her husband and bring him into the room where she had his tea ready for him.

As the older children tried to be first to serve their father his tea, the two Cratchits climbed up on his lap and each laid a cheek against his face, as if to say,



Bringing Bob Into the Room

A Christmas Carol

"Don't grieve, Father."

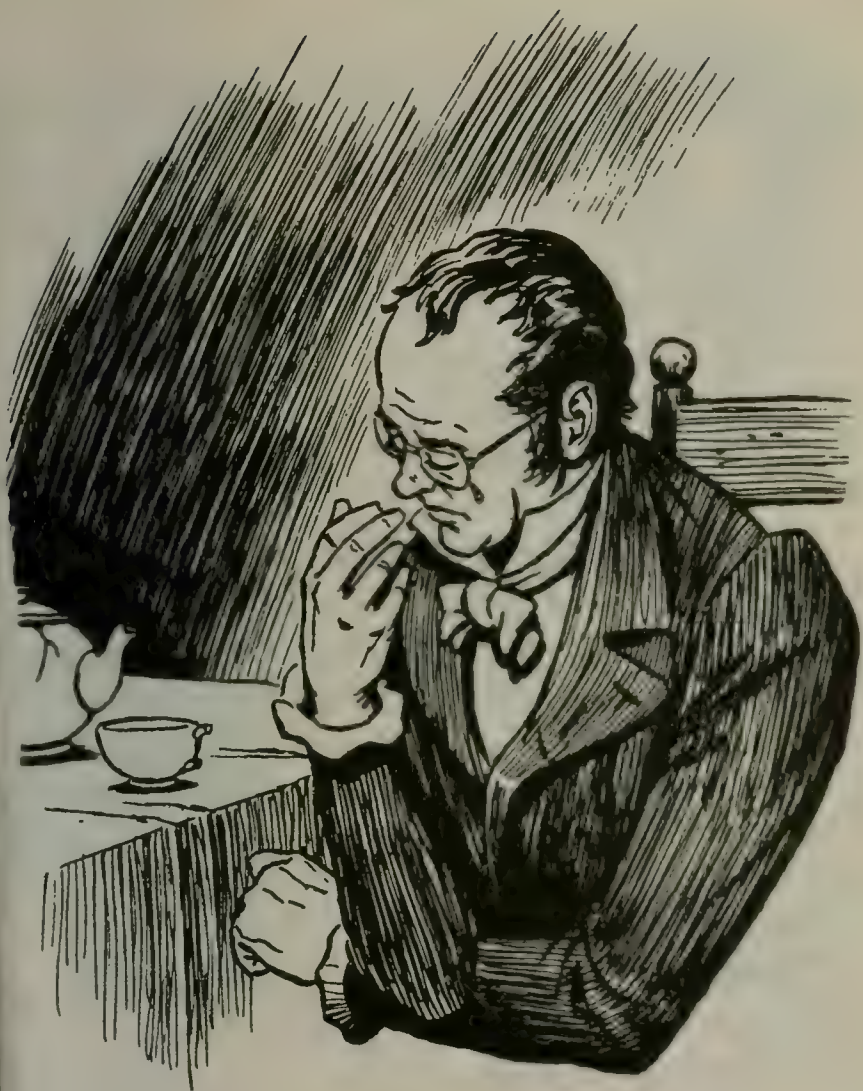
Bob Cratchit tried to be cheerful with his family and spoke pleasantly to them. He praised his wife's sewing and his daughters' as well.

"You have all worked quickly," he told them. "I'm sure these clothes will be ready to wear Sunday."

"Sunday?" asked his wife. "You mean you have made the arrangements for the funeral Sunday?"

"Yes, my dear," said Bob gently. "I went there today. I wish you could have gone too. It would have done you good to see how green and peaceful the place is. But you'll see it often. I promised him that I would walk there on Sundays. . . . Oh, my little child! My little child!"

Bob could no longer hold back his tears. And he wept for several minutes while his family looked on, helpless, unable to console him.



"Oh, My Little Child!"

A Christmas Carol

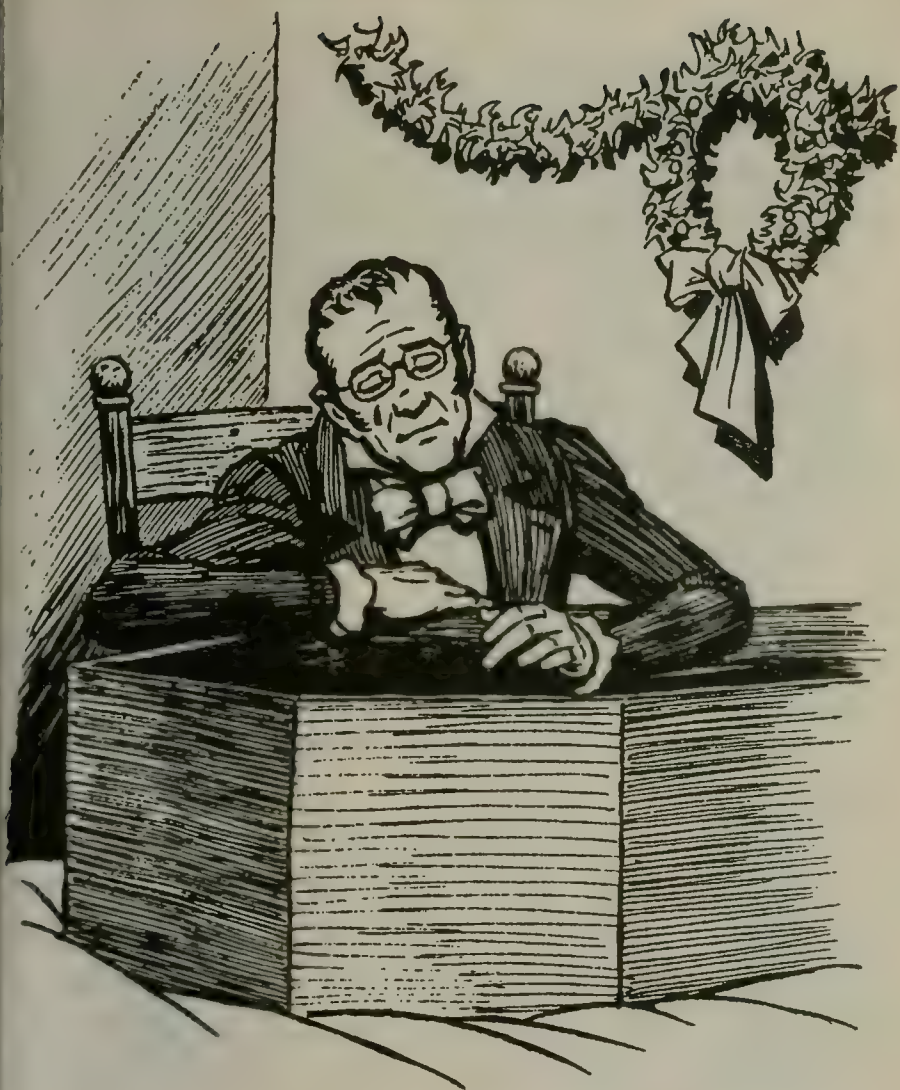
He left the room and went upstairs into a room that was cheerfully lit and hung with Christmas decorations. A chair was placed near a tiny coffin. Bob sat down and looked at the tiny, peaceful figure. Then he leaned over and kissed Tiny Tim's silent lips.

More composed now and feeling better for having shared that moment with his son, Bob went downstairs and rejoined his family around the fire.

"I met Mr. Scrooge's nephew today," he told them. "You know, I had only seen him once or twice before, but he seemed to sense that something was wrong, for he commented that I looked a bit down, and asked me why. Then, when I explained about our beloved Tiny Tim, he was just the kindest man ever. He said how sorry he was about our loss and so sorry for our entire family."

"That was kind of him," said Mrs. Cratchit.

"And then," continued Bob, "he gave me his



Sharing a Moment with His Son

A Christmas Carol

card and said, 'If I can be of any service to you in any way, here is where I live. Please do not hesitate to come to me.' Oh, he was so kind. It really seemed as if he had known our Tiny Tim and felt our grief with us."

"I'm sure he's a good soul," said Mrs. Cratchit.

"And I wouldn't be surprised—mark my words!—if he even tried to get our Peter a better job."

"Do you hear that, Peter?" exclaimed Mrs. Cratchit.

"And then Peter will find a girl," said Belinda, "and get married and. . . ."

"Get along with you!" cried Peter, grinning.

"There's plenty of time for that one of these days," said Bob. "We will all part from one another one day when all of you children are grown and married and with your own families, but I'm sure that none of us will ever forget poor Tiny Tim. . . and none of us will



An Offer of Kindness

A Christmas Carol

ever forget this first time that there has been a parting among us."

"We shall never forget, Father!" cried the children.

"And I know," said Bob, "I know, my dears, that when we recall how good and patient that little child was, we shall stop and think twice before we quarrel among ourselves."

"Yes, Father!" they all cried. "We shall."

"Then I shall be very happy," said Bob. "Very happy!"

Mrs. Cratchit kissed him; his daughters kissed him; the two young Cratchits kissed him; and Peter went out to him and shook his hand.

This, then, was the beautiful influence of the memory of Tiny Tim.

"Spirit," said Scrooge, "I am getting the feeling that our time to part is very close. Tell me, now, I beg of you, who that dead



The Beautiful Influence of Tiny Tim

A Christmas Carol

man was."

The Ghost of Christmas Yet To Come carried Scrooge along sometime in the Future, into the courtyard of the Scrooge and Marley Warehouse.

"This is my place of business," said Scrooge. "I see the building even now. Let me see myself as I will be in the days to come."

The Spirit stopped, its hand pointing away in another direction.

"My warehouse is *here!*" exclaimed Scrooge. "Why are you pointing elsewhere?"

The finger did not move, but continued pointing away.

Scrooge rushed to the window of his office and looked in. "It is still an office," he said, "but not mine. The furniture is different and the figure in the chair is not me."

Still the Phantom's finger pointed as before.

Scrooge took hold of the Spirit's robe, and they were gone again. They stopped when



"The Figure in the Chair Is Not Me."

A Christmas Carol

they reached an iron gate.

Scrooge paused to look around before he opened the gate. "It's a churchyard!" he exclaimed. "And underneath its ground lays the wretched man whose name I have been trying to learn. But what a wretched place this is! Closed in by houses! Overrun with weeds! Crowded with graves upon graves! Truly a worthy place for such a wretched man!"

The Spirit moved among the graves and pointed down towards one.

Scrooge approached it, trembling. Although the Phantom stood unmoving, Scrooge dreaded the new meaning he suddenly found in its deathlike shape.

"Before I draw closer to that stone you are pointing at, Spirit," said Scrooge fearfully, "answer me one question. Are the shadows you have shown me scenes of things that *will* be, or are they only scenes of things that *may* be?"

Still, the Spirit pointed downward to the



The Spirit Points Toward One Grave.

A Christmas Carol

grave.

"A man's life may lead him to certain ends," said Scrooge, "but if he changes the course of his life, will those ends change as well? Please tell me that this is so, for I fear what you are about to show me!"

Still the Spirit did not move.

Scrooge crept toward the grave, trembling as he followed the finger. Reaching the stone of the neglected grave, he read the name on the stone—EBENEZER SCROOGE!

"Am *I* that man who lay upon the bed?" he cried, looking up beseechingly at the Spirit.

The finger pointed from the grave to him and back again.

"No, Spirit! Oh, no, no!"

The finger was still pointing to the grave.

"Spirit!" cried Scrooge, clutching at its robe. "Hear me! I am not the man I was. I will not be that wretched creature any longer. Am I past all hope? Is this why you are showing me all this?"



"No, Spirit! Oh, No, No!"

A Christmas Carol

For the first time, the Spirit's hand appeared to shake.

"Good Spirit," pleaded Scrooge, "your good nature must have pity on me. Assure me that I can still change my life!"

The Spirit's hand trembled.

"I will honor Christmas in my heart," promised Scrooge, "and I will try to keep its spirit all year. I will live in the Past, the Present, and the Future. I will not forget the lessons that the Spirits of all three have taught me. Oh, please, tell me that I may erase the writing on this stone!"

In his agony, Scrooge reached out and caught at the Spirit's hand. But the Spirit was stronger than Scrooge and pulled its hand free.

Holding up his hands in one last prayer to have his fate changed, Scrooge suddenly saw the Phantom's hood and robe shrink. It continued to shrink and shrink until it finally collapsed into a bedpost!



"Your Good Nature Must Have Pity on Me."



Only the Bedpost Is There.

CHAPTER 7

Christmas Day

Yes. Only the bedpost was there—Scrooge's own bedpost in his own room. Best of all, the time was his own—time for Scrooge to make amends.

"I will live in the Past, the Present, and the Future!" vowed Scrooge. And he repeated those words over and over, as he happily **scrambled** out of bed. "Oh, Jacob Marley! Oh, Heaven and Christmas time! Praised be to you all for this—for my second chance. I say it on my knees, old Jacob, on my knees!"

Scrooge was sobbing now, but glowing

A Christmas Carol

happily in his sobbing. His face was wet with tears.

"They are not torn down!" he cried, folding one of the bed-curtains in his arms. "They are not torn down, rings and all. They are here. I am here. The shadows of things to come may still be changed. They will be. I know they will!"

Scrooge's hands were busy with his clothes as he rushed to get dressed. In his joyous excitement, he was turning his clothes inside out, putting them on upside down, tearing them, dropping them.

"I don't know what to do!" he cried, laughing and crying in the same breath. "I am as light as a feather! I am as happy as an angel! I am as merry as a schoolboy! I am as giddy as a drunken man! A Merry Christmas to everybody! A Happy New Year to all the world! Hallo! Whoopee!"

Scrooge had skipped into his sitting-room and was now standing there, out of breath.



"They Are Not Torn Down!"

A Christmas Carol

"There's my saucepan of broth still on the fireplace ledge!" he cried, skipping around again, overjoyed to see things as they were. "There's the door by which the Ghost of Jacob Marley entered! There's the corner where the Ghost of Christmas Present sat! There's the window through which I saw the wandering, crying spirits! It's all true! It all happened! Ha, ha, ha!"

For a man who had not had so much practice laughing for so many years, Scrooge's laugh was a splendid one, a brilliant one!

"I don't know what day of the month it is," he said. "I don't know how long I have been among the Spirits. I don't know anything. **I'm** a baby. Never mind. I don't care. I'd rather be a baby. Hallow! Whoopee!"

Scrooge was stopped for a moment in his bounding leaps by the church bells ringing out the loudest, happiest peals he had ever heard. "Ding, dong, bell!" Scrooge repeated with them in chorus. "Bell, dong, ding! Clang,



Overjoyed To See Things As They Were

A Christmas Carol

clash! Oh, glorious bells!"

Then running to the window, Scrooge opened it and stuck his head out. "The fog is gone!" he said happily. "The mist is gone! It is a clear, bright, happy, cold day. Cold enough to make my blood dance and dance gaily. Oh, golden sunlight, how you are shining! Oh, heavenly sky! Oh, sweet fresh air! Oh, merry bells! Oh, glorious, glorious life!"

Then, seeing a boy below dressed in Sunday clothes, Scrooge called down, "Tell me, lad, what day is today?"

"Huh?" answered the boy in surprise.

"What day is today, my fine fellow?" repeated Scrooge.

"Today?" replied the boy. "Why, it's Christmas Day!"

"It's Christmas Day!" whispered Scrooge joyously. "I haven't missed it after all. The Spirits did it all in one night. They can do anything they like. Of course they can!"

Then Scrooge leaned out the window again,



"Today? Why It's Christmas Day!"

A Christmas Carol

calling, "Hallo there, my fine fellow! Do you know the poultry shop at the corner of the next street?"

"Yes, sir. Of course," answered the boy.

"An intelligent lad!" said Scrooge, smiling. "In fact, a remarkable boy! . . . Tell me, lad, do you know if they've sold the prize turkey that's been hanging up in the window? Not the little one—the big one?"

"You mean the one as big as me?" asked the boy.

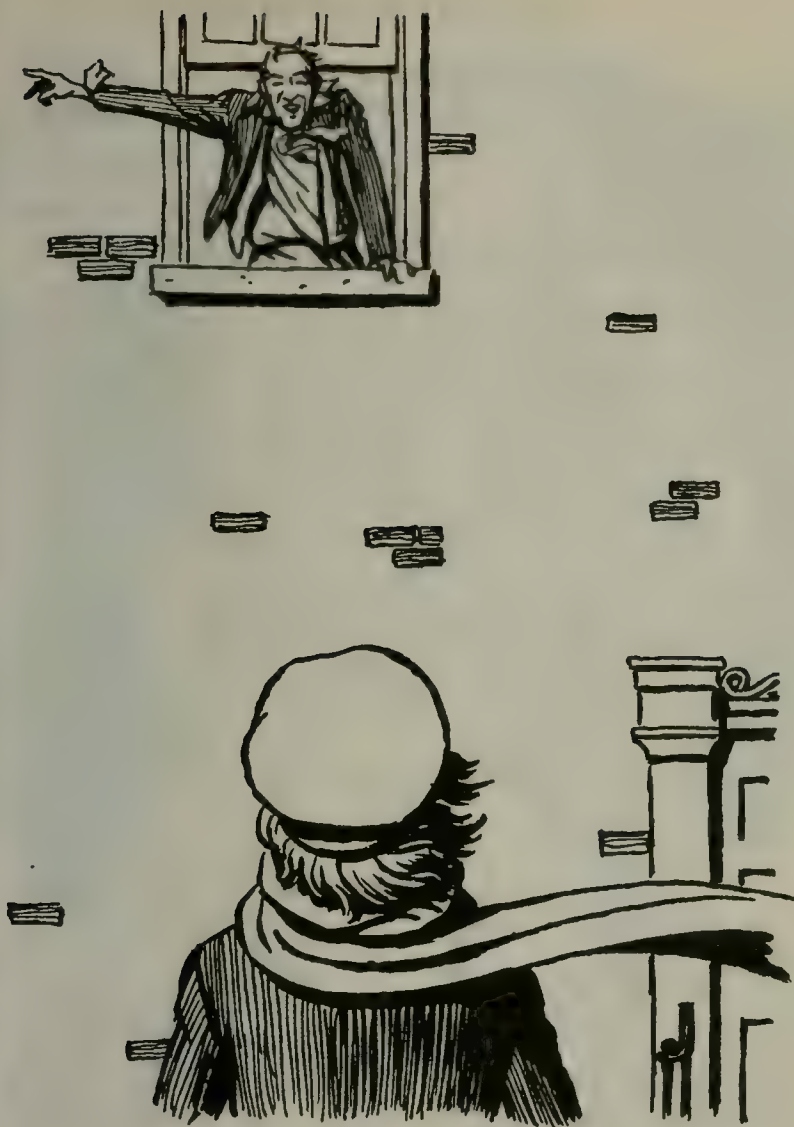
"What a delightful boy!" exclaimed Scrooge. "What a pleasure to talk to him! . . . Yes, my lad, that's the one I mean."

"It's hanging there now, sir," answered the boy.

"Good!" cried Scrooge. "Go and buy it!"

"You're joking!" exclaimed the boy.

"No, no," said Scrooge. "I am serious. Go and buy it and tell 'em to bring it here and I'll give 'em directions where to take it. Go now, boy. And come back with the poultry man and



"Go and Buy It!"

A Christmas Carol

I'll give you a shilling for your trouble. In fact, lad, if you come back with him in less than five minutes, I'll give you half a crown!"

The boy took off like a shot!

"I'll send it to Bob Cratchit's," whispered Scrooge, rubbing his hands in anticipation and splitting his sides with laughter. "And he shan't know who sent it. Why, that turkey's twice the size of Tiny Tim! What a fine joke this will be!"

Scrooge set about writing the Cratchits' address on a piece of paper. His hand was not very steady after all he had been through, but write it he did! Then he rushed downstairs and to the door to wait for the poultry man.

As Scrooge stood there waiting for him to arrive, the large door knocker caught his eye. "I shall love you as long as I live," he cried, patting the knocker lovingly. "I hardly ever looked at you before, knocker. What an honest expression you have on your face! You're a wonderful knocker! . . . Oh, here's the turkey.



"What a Fine Joke This Will Be!"

A Christmas Carol

Hallo! How are you? Merry Christmas!"

And what a turkey it was! Scrooge couldn't see how the bird ever could have stood on its legs, for its body was so huge!

"Why, it's impossible to carry that turkey all the way to that part of town where the Cratchits live," Scrooge told the poultry man. "You must take a cab."

Scrooge chuckled as he said this, and chuckled as he paid for the turkey, and chuckled when he paid for the cab, and chuckled when he tipped the boy. But the loudest chuckle came when he sat down, breathless, in his chair and chuckled till he cried.

Shaving was next—not an easy task for Scrooge, as his hand continued to shake, since he was dancing as he was doing it. But if he had cut off the end of his nose, he would have put a piece of bandage over it and quite forgotten about it.

He dressed himself in his best clothes and



What a Turkey It Is!

A Christmas Carol

went down into the street. By now, people were walking about, as he had seen them do with the Ghost of Christmas Present.

Walking with his hands behind him, Scrooge looked at everyone with a delighted smile. He looked so pleasant, in fact, that three or four jovial men said, "Good morning, sir! A Merry Christmas to you!"

Scrooge was to say later that of all the happy sounds he had ever heard, those were the happiest to his ears!

He had not gone far when he saw approaching him the stout gentleman who, with his associate, had visited his warehouse yesterday to request a donation for charity. "Oh, dear!" thought Scrooge. "What must that old gentleman think of me! I must change that opinion immediately!"

So Scrooge quickened his steps until he was face to face with the man. "My dear sir," he said, taking the startled gentleman by both hands. "How do you do? I hope you were



A Delighted Smile for Everyone!

A Christmas Carol

successful yesterday. I hope you collected much money for the poor. It was so kind of you to give your time for this noble effort! A Merry Christmas to you, sir!"

"Mr. Scrooge?" asked the man, bewildered. "Are you the same Mr. Scrooge I called on yesterday?"

"Yes," answered Scrooge, "that is my name, although I fear you might not think too highly of it. Please let me ask your pardon and will you accept. . . ." And Scrooge whispered in the old gentleman's ear.

"Lord bless me!" cried the gentleman, as he gasped for breath. "My dear Mr. Scrooge, are you serious?"

"Yes," said Scrooge, "and not a shilling less! This includes a great many back payments that I missed. Now, will you accept it?"

"My dear sir," said the gentleman, shaking hands with Scrooge, "I don't know what to say to such generosity! Why I—"



“My Dear Mr. Scrooge, Are You Serious?”

A Christmas Carol

"Don't say anything, please," interrupted Scrooge. "Just come and see me from time to time when you are nearby. Will you?"

"I will!" cried the old gentleman. And he really meant it.

"Thank you," said Scrooge. "And God bless you!"

Scrooge spent the rest of that Christmas morning in a most remarkable way—a way he had never done before. He went to church, then walked about the streets. He watched people hurrying to and fro; he patted children on the head; he talked to beggars; he looked into windows of houses and took pleasure in seeing happy people enjoying the holiday. Everything he did, everything he saw gave him pleasure. He had never dreamed that any walk—that anything—could bring him so much happiness.

In the afternoon, Scrooge turned his steps to his nephew's house. But when he reached the door, he walked past it a dozen times



Scrooge Goes to Church.

A Christmas Carol

before he got up the courage to knock. Finally, he made a dash to the door and knocked.

A smiling young housemaid answered the door.

"Is your master at home, my dear?" asked Scrooge.

"Yes, sir."

"Where is he, my dear?"

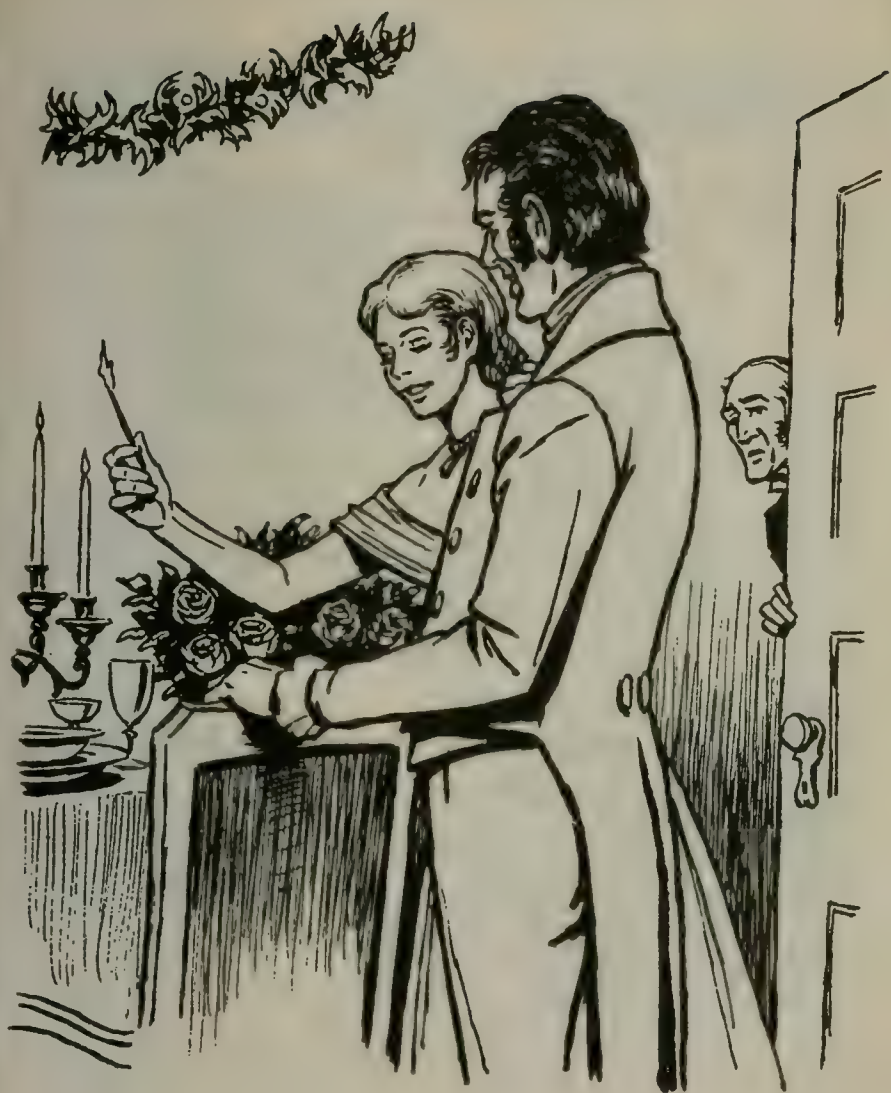
"In the dining room, sir, along with the mistress. I'll show you in and announce you, sir."

"Thank you," said Scrooge, with his hand already on the dining room door knob. "He knows me. I'll go right in."

Scrooge turned the knob gently and peeked his face around the slightly open door. His niece and nephew were standing admiring their beautifully set holiday dinner table, making certain that everything was ready for their guests when they arrived.

"Fred!" called Scrooge.

"Why, bless my soul!" cried Fred. "Who is it?"



Admiring a Holiday Dinner Table

A Christmas Carol

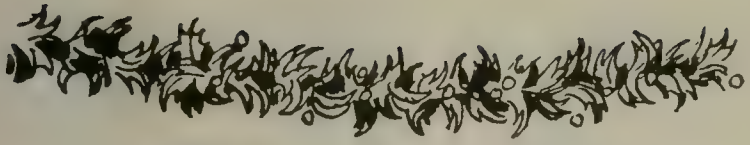
"It is I, your Uncle Scrooge. I have come to dinner. Will you let me in?"

"Let you in!" cried Fred, rushing up to Scrooge and shaking his hand so hard and so long, that it seemed to Scrooge his hand might fall off.

It took no more than five minutes and Uncle Scrooge was feeling right at home. Nothing could have made him happier.

Then the guests came—all those guests Scrooge had seen when he was with the Ghost of Christmas Present. And they all looked the same as they did in the Spirit's shadows.

It was a wonderful party, with all the music and all the games Scrooge had only been able to hear and watch earlier. Now he was part of them—part of the wonderful friendly spirit, part of the wonderful gaiety, part of the wonderful happiness!



Uncle Scrooge Feels Right at Home.



Scrooge Is at His Office Early.

CHAPTER 8

A New Boss for Bob

Early the next morning Scrooge arrived at his office early. He had his heart set on being there especially early...and even catching Bob Cratchit coming in late.

And he did. Yes, he did! The clock struck nine. No Bob. A quarter past nine. No Bob.

"He's now eighteen and a half minutes late," said Scrooge with a grin as he sat at his desk with the door open so he could watch for this clerk.

Suddenly, the outer door burst open and in one movement, Bob Cratchit removed his hat

A Christmas Carol

and scarf, and was on his stool, pen in hand.

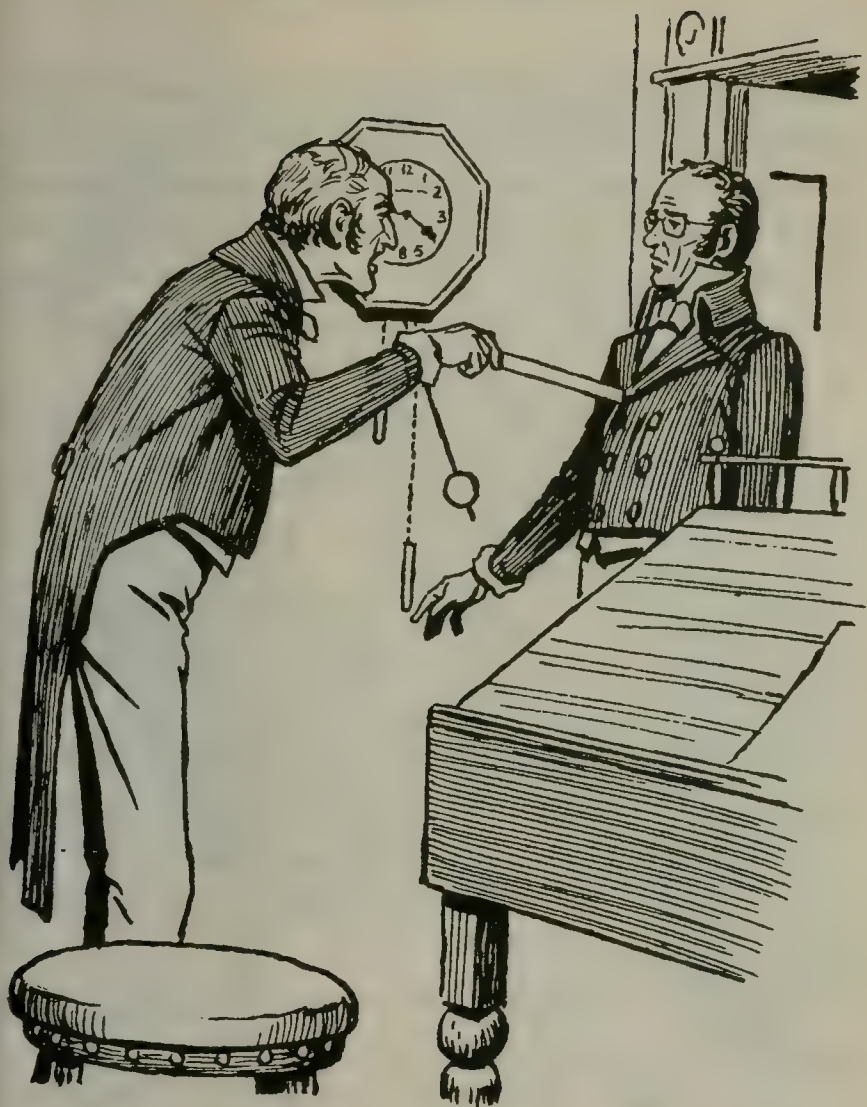
"Hallo!" growled Scrooge, trying hard to use his former harsh voice. "What do you mean by strolling in here at this hour of the day?"

"I'm very sorry, sir," said Bob, as his pen was speedily scratching away. "I know I'm late."

"Yes, I think you are," said Scrooge. "Come into my office immediately!"

"It only happened once, sir," pleaded Bob, as he appeared at the door to Scrooge's office. "It won't happen again, sir. I promise. It was only because of the holiday celebration yesterday, sir."

"I'm not going to stand for this sort of thing any longer," growled Scrooge as he leaped down from his stool with his ruler in his hand and came face to face with Cratchit. "And so," added Scrooge, pounding his ruler into the young man's chest and forcing him to back out of the office, "so I am going to raise your salary!"



Coming Face to Face with Cratchit

A Christmas Carol

Bob trembled and took a few timid steps toward the ruler. He had the momentary idea of grabbing that ruler and knocking Scrooge down with it and holding the old man on the floor while he called for the police to bring a straitjacket—for surely Scrooge had lost his mind!

“A Merry Christmas, Bob!” said Scrooge. And his voice was so sincere that Bob could no longer doubt that the old man really meant what he said.

Bob smiled, but still could not speak as Scrooge slapped him on the back and repeated his Christmas wishes.

“A Merrier Christmas, my good fellow, than I have ever given you in many years!” said Scrooge, smiling. “Not only am I raising your salary, but I am going to try to help your struggling family too.”

Bob still stood frozen in amazement, and could only nod and smile.

“Yes, Bob,” continued Scrooge, “we will



Has Scrooge Lost His Mind?

A Christmas Carol

discuss all these things this very afternoon over a Christmas drink of hot port wine. We'll talk about an apprenticeship for Master Peter, and see what doctors we can find to help Tiny Tim. We'll scour the entire world if we have to, but we'll find someone who can do something for that angel of a boy!" "Y-yes, sir!" exclaimed Bob, sobbing. "Th-thank you, sir!"

"And, Bob," added Scrooge, "let's raise the fire and get more heat in here. In fact, hurry out right now and buy another coal bucket to keep in your office, and lots more coal as well. And do it before you dot another *i* with your pen, Bob Cratchit!"



"Let's Raise the Fire."



A Good Boss

CHAPTER 9

The New Ebenezer Scrooge

Scrooge kept his word. He did everything he promised and more. . . much more.

To Tiny Tim, who did not die and who even walked again without his crutches, Scrooge became a second father.

He became as good a friend, as good a boss, and as good a citizen as the old city—or any other city in the world—had ever known.

Some people laughed to see the change in him, but Scrooge let them laugh, for he knew that nothing good ever happened in this world that some people did not laugh at, at first.

A Christmas Carol

What was more important to Scrooge, was that his own heart was laughing—laughing with joy at giving and helping others.

Ebenezer Scrooge had no further meetings with the Spirits, but still he continued to live a good life. People soon began to say of him that *he* truly knew the meaning of the spirit of Christmas, perhaps better than any man alive. And he lived with that spirit not only at Christmas time, but all during the year.

And Ebenezer Scrooge's words, for the rest of his long and happy life, were Tiny Tim's words—"God bless us, everyone!"



"God Bless Us, Everyone!"

**CHRISTMAS
BEDTIME STORIES**
Claudia Vurnakes

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The nurse suggested a walk in the park.

The Christmas Bluebird

Long ago, in a kingdom far away, there lived a sweet little princess. It was Christmas Eve, and everyone in the palace, from the king down to the youngest servant, was busy with holiday tasks. To keep the little princess from getting in the way, her nurse suggested they take a walk in the park.

The little princess ran and jumped in the snow until she was quite red-cheeked. Her tiny gold crown slipped off, and she looked like any other happy child playing on a winter afternoon.

As she darted around the snow-capped hedges, a flash of color suddenly caught her

CHRISTMAS BEDTIME STORIES

eye. There, under the bushes, panted a little bluebird, shivering in the cold, worn out from flying against the strong winter winds.

"You poor little thing!" exclaimed the princess. "Nurse? Nurse, come help me, please. I've found a tiny frozen bird!"

But the nurse had met up with a friend and they were chatting on the other side of the park.

"Oh, what am I to do? I have nothing for you to eat, poor thing. You are so weak and so cold," the princess cried.

Just then, a boy's hand reached down and picked up the tiny trembling creature. It was young Robert, son of the village carpenter. He had been walking home through the park when he heard the princess talking to the bird.

"Let me help, little girl," he said. "I have some bread crumbs here in my pocket the bird can eat. We'll feed her and warm her up. Then maybe she will be able to go on with her journey to the southland."



"You poor thing! You are so cold!"

CHRISTMAS BEDTIME STORIES

The princess looked up at the boy, "Oh, the court would be so grateful if you could help her! It would distress us greatly if she had to stay here in the snow. She would freeze to death! We cannot allow that to happen in this kingdom!"

Together, the two children gave the creature a few precious minutes of rest.

The princess used her wool scarf to shield the little bird from the cold, and Robert held crumbs up to her beak so she could peck them. In half an hour, the bluebird was hopping from one child's shoulder to the other's. Soon, she tested her wings in a short flight around the hedges, and finally swooped off to head south again.

Robert and the little girl watched the bird disappear. Then the girl noticed the sky was growing dark.

"Goodness, Nurse will be mad if I stay away any longer. I must return to the palace now, but I want to thank you for helping the



Together, they cared for the little bird.

CHRISTMAS BEDTIME STORIES

little bird. I assure you, young sir, your kindness will not be forgotten." The pretty child solemnly shook the big boy's hand, and walked away down the path.

Robert laughed as he headed home in the other direction, "What a funny little girl. She talked to me as if she were a queen. I wonder who she is?"

Just then, he bumped into a very worried-looking woman running down the path.

"Boy," she cried, "have you seen a little girl playing here in the park?"

"Why, yes," he answered. "She just left to look for her nurse. Who is she, anyway?"

"Shame on you, boy. Don't you recognize Her Majesty, the Princess?" and the nurse ran off to look for the little girl.

That night, both children snuggled in warm beds. Under her fine woolen blanket, the princess saw visions of Christmas and bluebirds and big boys. Robert slept under a tattered quilt, the face of a merry little girl



Robert dreamed of the funny little princess.

CHRISTMAS BEDTIME STORIES

peeking out at him from the corner of his dreams.

Many years passed, and the little princess grew into a lovely young woman. Because she was kind as well as beautiful, she had many royal suitors from foreign lands asking for her hand in marriage. The princess went to her father in despair.

"Father, what am I to do? There are many suitors calling at the palace every day, and yet I see no one who interests me. I care nothing for riches or power. I want to marry a man who is strong in body and keen of mind. But most important of all, I want a man with a good heart. How can I find that man, Father?"

Together, the king and his daughter planned contests for all the young men in the kingdom. The tests would point them to the man with the strongest body, the keenest mind, and the best heart.

"But Father," the princess worried, "what



"I want to find a man with a good heart."

CHRISTMAS BEDTIME STORIES

if I don't love that man who wins the contests?"

"Let us wait and see, child. When the time comes, you will know what is right," the wise king replied.

The foreign princes were sent home and a proclamation was posted at every market and every workplace. The king promised his daughter in marriage to the one man with the strongest body, the keenest mind, and the best heart. All the young men of the land took part in the contests, for didn't everyone, rich and poor alike, have an equal chance?

After a lengthy season of wrestling matches, foot races, and chess games, the king announced that two men had shown themselves to be the best in strength and intelligence. One was the son of a nobleman, blessed with education and courtly manners. The other contestant was a simple young carpenter, handsome and upright, but poor.



"If only I could see into their hearts!"

CHRISTMAS BEDTIME STORIES

From a seat by her father's side, the princess searched each man's face.

"I'd marry 'em both if I was you, Princess!" shouted a witty old peasant woman from the crowd. "They's both fine lookin'!"

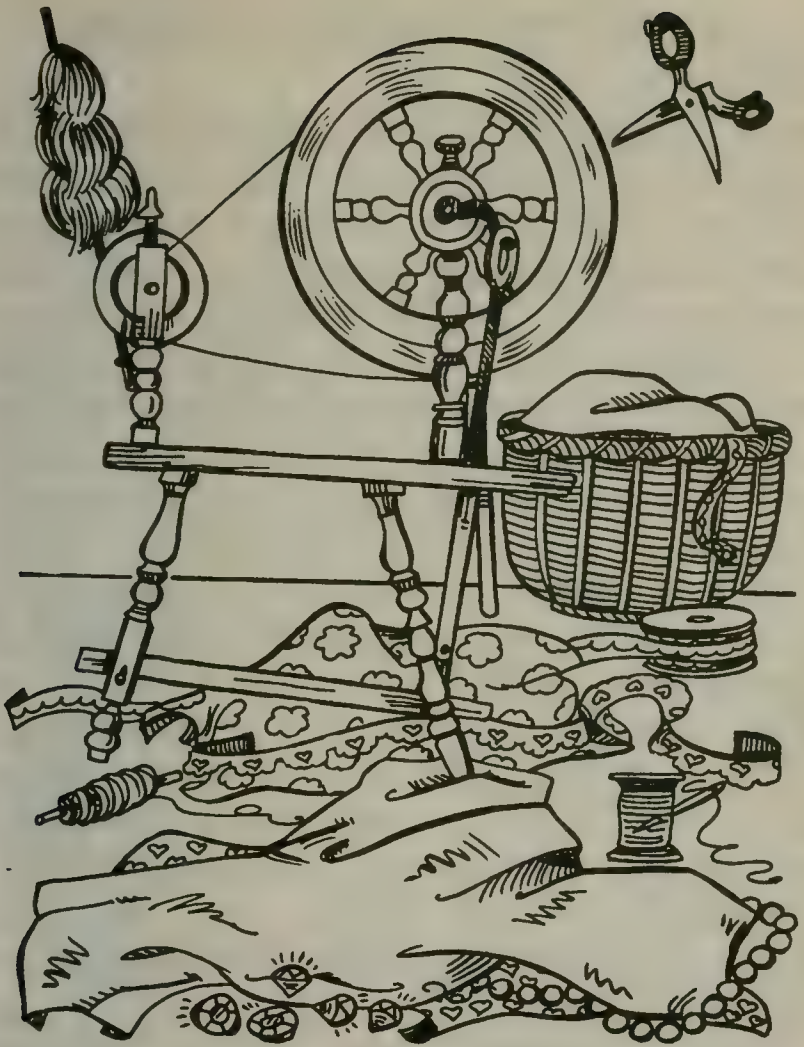
Indeed, they were. "If only I could see into their hearts," thought the princess. "Perhaps then I would know which man to love as my husband."

The king announced the final test: the man who could make the most beautiful gown for the princess—in one night's time—would marry her on Christmas Day.

The princess turned puzzled eyes to the king, "Sewing a gown? How can this test reveal what is in a man's heart? I should have just married your tailor, Father!"

"Trust in Providence, my dear," her father replied. "I feel we may learn much, watching this final challenge."

Christmas Eve arrived, and the king threw open the doors to a workroom filled



The final test—to sew a gown.

CHRISTMAS BEDTIME STORIES

with every kind of fine silk and satin. The two suitors sat down at tables supplied with scissors, thread, pins, and needles. The doors were locked, not to be opened again until dawn on Christmas Day. The king and his daughter settled down on chairs in the hall outside the workroom. A servant pulled back a curtain to reveal a tiny peep hole in the wall. The hole would allow them to look into the room, to watch this final test.

At first, there was a flurry of activity as the young men made their choices from among the cloths of silver and gold. On her chair beside the peep hole, the princess watched their scissors slicing into the fabric. Each slash felt like a knife in her heart, and she whispered a prayer, "Please, give me a Christmas miracle. Let the right man win, the man with the best heart, the man I can love forever!"

Hours passed and the bustle in the sewing room settled down to the quiet of pinning



"Let the right man win!"

CHRISTMAS BEDTIME STORIES

and basting. The first suitor, the young nobleman, was busy putting together a gown as bright as the rainbow. The sleeves were crimson silk, the bodice was sky blue, the skirt shone with purple and gold threads, and the collar was a brilliant emerald green. Next, the nobleman selected lace and ribbons and jewels of every description. The princess approved of the lavish choices the young man had made. Did the rich fabrics he was cutting mirror a richness of heart? She watched carefully as he picked up a needle to begin sewing.

First, the nobleman clipped long, long threads of gold. He started stitching. The gold thread certainly sparkled against the rainbow gown, but no matter how carefully he stitched, the thread would tangle. Knots leaped onto his needle, spoiling the seams of the beautiful dress. The princess noticed that he pulled out the tangles with an angry jerk.



Knots spoiled the seams.

CHRISTMAS BEDTIME STORIES

Over at the carpenter's table, work progressed more slowly. The young man's rough hands snagged the delicate fabric before him. So many lovely colors, so many choices . . . and yet, it was hopeless. What did he know of courtly jewelled gowns? He was a simple carpenter, not someone the princess would want to marry. Yes, he had done well in the king's other contests, and he had let himself hope that his dream might come true. But now . . .

The carpenter closed his eyes and remembered back to a Christmas long, long ago when he had first seen the princess. He knew she didn't remember, but in his mind, the picture was crystal clear. He saw a boy and a little girl kneeling together in the snow to care for a frozen bird. Through the years, he had secretly watched the funny little girl grow up. His father was often called to the palace to repair broken chairs or to build new closets. Robert always tagged



Robert secretly watched the princess.

CHRISTMAS BEDTIME STORIES

along, just to get another glimpse of the princess. He saw her sneak food to a hungry old man, and he heard the kind words she had for even the clumsiest servant. Robert didn't know when it happened, but he knew he had loved her for a long time.

Sighing at the hopelessness of the task before him, Robert finally selected a single piece of satin the color of a sunrise. Carefully he cut out a simple dress. "Some say this is a night of miracles. If only that might be true," he murmured.

Watching from the peep hole, the princess frowned at the plainness of the carpenter's gown.

At that moment, a weak fluttering noise drew Robert to the window. The princess saw that a bluebird lay in the snow on the ledge. The little creature trembled with cold and exhaustion. "Poor thing, come and get warm," said Robert, carrying the bird to his table. He spent long moments gently stroking the tiny



"Could this be the very same bluebird?"

CHRISTMAS BEDTIME STORIES

body until the bird was warm enough to hop around. Next, he found some crumbs in his coat pocket and spread them out for the bird to eat.

Memories of long ago suddenly stirred in the princess's mind. Could this carpenter be that same boy . . . ? Could this be the blue-bird . . . ?

"You can fly away now, pretty thing. I must get back to work if I am to win the princess I have loved for so long," Robert said. He picked up his needle and a spool of thread. With a sudden swoop, the bird snipped a very short piece of thread from the spool. Holding the thread in her beak, she flew straight to Robert's hand and slipped the thread neatly through the needle.

The carpenter laughed. "Thanks, little friend. That's a good trick, but I have no time to play. I need a long piece of thread for all the stitching I must do this night." And Robert pulled the short thread out of the



“That’s a good trick!”

CHRISTMAS BEDTIME STORIES

needle. Quickly the bird grabbed the same short piece and threaded it back.

"You want me to use this short thread, don't you? Perhaps I should try." Robert began sewing with the bird's piece of thread. Slowly, the gold stitches crept down the seams of the plain satin gown. No knots, no puckers, no tangles. Each time Robert ran out of thread, the little bird had another short piece ready for him.

As the night passed, each suitor worked on. The princess watched the nobleman fuss over his long tangled threads, while the carpenter stitched smoothly with his short ones, the bluebird perched on his shoulder.

Long before either man was ready, the first rays of morning crept through the window. The nobleman threw down his needle and grabbed for the straight pins. He finished his brilliant gown trimmed in lace and jewels, but half of it was only pinned together. The other half was spoiled by large



“You want me to use this short thread?”

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uneven stitches, with knots and loops of thread, and puckers down each seam. Robert calmly tied a neat knot, and the little bird clipped the gold thread from the last seam on the carpenter's gown. The simple dress was done. Every seam was carefully stitched, but there were no jewels to relieve its plainness. "No Christmas miracle for me," Robert thought sadly.

The king unlocked the door to the work-room as trumpets blared. All the lords and ladies of the court filed in to see the outcome of the king's test. Last of all came the princess, wearing only a bathrobe, ready to try on the gowns stitched by her suitors.

A sigh rippled through the crowd as the king held up the young nobleman's gown. At first glance, it was a lovely thing. The gems sparkled, the brilliant colors shone, and lacy ruffles floated down the front. With a heavy heart, the princess slipped behind a screen and pulled the dress over her head.



At first glance, it was a lovely thing.

CHRISTMAS BEDTIME STORIES

"O-h-h! I'm stuck!" she gasped. "Someone help me, I can't move!"

The ladies-in-waiting jumped to help the princess out of her prison of pins. They placed the gown before the king. In the clear light of day, every pin, every pucker, every knotted golden thread showed plainly.

The king frowned. "I fear this gown reveals the true nature of your heart, young sir. No matter how beautiful the outside may be, it cannot hide the knots and tangles of a troubled soul."

He turned to Robert and picked up the carpenter's simple dress. No lace, no tucks, no trimmings, no jewels, just plain golden stitches marching neatly down satin the color of sunrise. With trembling fingers, the princess slipped into the gown and stepped out before her father and all the court. The bluebird flew over and perched on her shoulder. Brightness streamed into the room. It lit up the sunrise satin until the lovely young



Just a simple dress.

CHRISTMAS BEDTIME STORIES

woman in the simple dress blazed like a slender candle on a dark night.

"What sight could be more beautiful than this?" laughed the king. "Daughter, what say you? Will you take this good man Robert to be your husband?"

The princess was silent for a long moment, overcome by the strange new feelings leaping up in her heart. At last she spoke. "I am satisfied," she said, "that I have found the one man in all the land with the strongest body, the keenest mind, and the best heart. A man is never stronger than when he lends a hand to a poor suffering creature. His mind is never keener than when he listens to good advice, regardless of the source. And his heart is never purer than when he follows his dream, no matter how hopeless it seems."

It was a joyous Christmas wedding, with beautiful carols and bird songs gladdening the hearts of all who heard.



It was a wonderful wedding.



Amber had a very special jar.

The Mason Jar

Amber had a very special jar.

Amber herself was a very special person. She had dark brown eyes that danced when she was happy. Her cheeks were tan and smooth, and her curly hair hung in a thick braid down her back. Little brown curls popped out all around her head, like a halo. But the most special thing of all was Amber's smile. It lit up her whole face. Granny said Amber's smile was like turning on the light in a dark room. Strangers passing on the sidewalk would stop for a second look at the happy young face.

But right now, Amber wasn't smiling. She

CHRISTMAS BEDTIME STORIES

was sitting on her bed with a quart jar in her lap, and she was frowning.

Let me tell you about this jar. It was a Mason jar, a glass jar that people use for home-canned beans or strawberry jam. The jar had a wide mouth, large enough for a big spoon. Raised numbers on the side showed cups and ounces. This particular jar was one of the older types. It came with its own glass top. When the jar was full, you put the top on and lifted the wire attached to the neck of the jar. The wire held the top tight.

In days gone by, Mason jars were important because people had no other way to preserve food. They would pack their vegetables in jars, seal the lids, then place the jars in a deep pot of boiling water. This killed the bacteria that caused fresh food to spoil. Today, most people don't bother with canning. It's much easier just to buy cans of food from the grocery store. That's why Amber's granny had given her the Mason jar.



People preserved their vegetables.

CHRISTMAS BEDTIME STORIES

"There aren't many of these old jars left, Amber," Granny said. "Every time I see one, I think of Mama June's kitchen. She had shelves and shelves of these jars, each one with something good inside that we had grown ourselves. Cherries, tomatoes, beans, pickles, jam, peaches. U-m-m, um! My mouth waters just thinking about them. Take good care of this jar, and it will really be valuable some day."

The jar was already valuable. It contained \$38.52.

For almost a year, Amber had been saving up to buy the guitar in Music City's window. From the first day she saw it, she knew it was meant to be hers. Glossy golden wood, nylon strings white against the dark neck of the guitar. A fancy wooden design around the sound hole, and tuning keys that looked like ivory.

Amber had never played a guitar, but she just knew she could. Especially a guitar like



Amber knew she could play this guitar.

CHRISTMAS BEDTIME STORIES

this one. Her fingers already knew how it would feel to press the strings against the frets. In bed at night, she strummed an imaginary guitar, letting the nails of her right hand pluck notes from the strings. Her body already knew how to cradle the instrument, how to lean into the sound until the guitar and the guitar-player became one thing. How wonderful it would be to strum and sing, and strum and sing!

All she needed was twelve more dollars. The guitar at Music City cost \$49.99. Twelve dollars would give Amber enough to pay for the guitar, with some change left over for tax. Maybe she would get some money for Christmas. Maybe, maybe by the end of January, the guitar at last would be hers!

Amber had worked hard all year, saving money to put in the Mason jar. In addition to the regular chores she did for Granny, she raked leaves and she did some babysitting. All her birthday money went straight in the



All she needed was twelve more dollars.

CHRISTMAS BEDTIME STORIES

jar, and last summer, when she went to the carnival, she only let herself spend \$2.50. The guitar was much more important than going on every ride. Amber made some money on their paper route, too. In October, Granny had taken over an early morning route for the Ledger-Star. Granny rolled the papers and put the rubber bands on. Amber delivered them so Granny could stay home while Jamie slept.

Jamie was Amber's younger brother. He had a disease that left his legs too weak to walk on, so he used a wheelchair. Jamie looked a lot like his older sister. He had the same warm brown skin and curly hair. He had a nice smile, too, almost as nice as Amber's. But Jamie was famous for his singing. He loved to sing, and he did it all the time. On Sundays, his sweet clear voice soared above the heads of sleepy church-goers. Mrs. Whidbee, who played the piano, thought Jamie was one of the best singers she had ever heard.



Amber helped with granny's route.

CHRISTMAS BEDTIME STORIES

"Have you ever thought about getting some music lessons for that child?" she had asked Granny.

Granny had a hard time just paying doctor bills and keeping food on the table. That's why the Mason jar money was so important. Granny couldn't afford extras, like music lessons or a guitar. Anything special that Amber wanted, she had to save for herself. Like the guitar. Now, just twelve dollars away, there was a problem.

It was Jamie. For weeks, the church choir had been working on music for their Christmas performance at the shopping mall. All the choirs from churches around town got together, and the Saturday before Christmas, they put on a huge program in the middle of the mall. This year, Jamie was supposed to sing a solo in front of all those shoppers. The song was "Go Tell It on the Mountain," and Jamie sounded great. But now he wasn't going to do it. He didn't have the clothes Mrs.



Jamie's voice woke sleepy church-goers.

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Whidbee said they had to wear for the performance, so he just wasn't going to do it.

Granny didn't know anything about the problem. Jamie hadn't mentioned it at home. The only reason Amber knew was that Mrs. Whidbee had stopped her in the hall at church and reminded her that Jamie needed a white shirt and a pair of black pants. The choir always wore robes when they sang at church, so clothes had never been a problem before.

It was a good thing that Amber and Jamie were such nice-looking kids, Granny always said with a laugh, because they sure didn't get any help from wearing fancy clothes. In fact, most of their clothes came out of the charity closet at church. Granny always ironed and mended and kept their things spotless, but that couldn't hide the fact that they were all second-hand. Jamie didn't have a white shirt or a pair of black pants because no one had donated any to the closet. Maybe Mrs. Whid-



Amber and Jamie wore second-hand clothes.

CHRISTMAS BEDTIME STORIES

bee just didn't know that's how it was with them.

That afternoon, Amber talked to Jamie. Or at least she tried to.

"You know, you could borrow a white shirt from one of your friends at school."

No answer.

"Well, what if you just wore your regular clothes? Would that be so bad? Since you're singing a solo, you need to stand out from the crowd anyway."

Jamie blew up. "Thanks a lot! I already stand out from the crowd too much because of this dumb wheelchair! I-I just won't sing at the mall." He rolled off into another room.

That night, like most nights, Jamie sang and sang in the bathroom as he washed up. Amber sat on her bed and listened. "Go-o, tell it on the mo-un-tain, O-ver the hills and ev-'ry-wh-ere . . ."

Everything that Jamie couldn't do because of his wheelchair went into his singing. It



“What if you just wore your regular clothes?”

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was such rich singing. On a happy song, his voice bubbled, and when the song was sad, you wanted to cry. But no matter what the song was, you wanted to go on listening and listening. It just wasn't right. Jamie already missed so much because he couldn't walk. It just wasn't right that he should miss his solo because of clothes.

The Mason jar full of dollar bills and coins felt heavy in Amber's lap. She shut her eyes and she could see every inch of the gleaming golden guitar.

"G-o tell it on the mo-un-tain, O-ver the hills . . ."

Slowly, carefully, so it wouldn't hurt so much, Amber closed the door on the idea of the guitar.

The Saturday before Christmas came and Amber was up bright and early to deliver newspapers. She rushed home and ran into Jamie's room.

"Come on, lazy bones! You've got to wash



"Come on, lazy bones!"

CHRISTMAS BEDTIME STORIES

up for the choir performance. It's Knock-Their-Socks-Off-Solo Day!"

Jamie pulled a pillow over his head to hide tears. "I'm not going, remember? Get out and leave me alone."

Amber couldn't resist a tad of teasing. "Oh, so Mr. High-and-Mighty is too good to sing with that pitiful little choir down at the mall? Take that, you dirty rat!"

She threw a shopping bag at Jamie's head and ran out of the room.

It was a proud, proud day. The whole choir did a wonderful job. When it came time for Jamie's solo, he rolled his wheelchair out in front of the crowd and picked up the microphone as natural as any TV star. He looked so fine up there in his crisp new white shirt and black pants. Then he opened his mouth to sing. The sweet strong voice grew and grew until it filled every corner of the mall.

"G-o, tell it on the mo-un-tain, O-ver the hills and ev-'ry-wh-ere!"



The whole choir did a wonderful job.

CHRISTMAS BEDTIME STORIES

Shoppers all over stopped to listen. For Jamie, Amber and Granny, this was Christmas. Nothing could be any better than this moment. Oh, they had a big meal on Christmas day, and they exchanged the small presents they had bought for one another. But this was it, the shining moment to be tucked away in the heart and saved forever.

Later that night, after Granny had tucked an exhausted, happy Jamie in bed, she came in Amber's room. She had a dollar bill in her hand. Amber watched as Granny dropped the money in the Mason jar.

"Well, it's not an empty Mason jar any more," Granny smiled. "Now it's a ready Mason jar!" And she kissed Amber good-night.



"Now it's a ready Mason jar!"



Just two days until Christmas!

Happy Birthday, Sandwich Jackson!

“Frankie, honey, I might not have time to get a fancy birthday cake made. Would a cake mix do?”

Mrs. Jackson looked up from the piles of Christmas cookies she was decorating to catch her 10-year old son sneak a big swipe of icing. She lightly popped his hand.

Frankie’s temper flared,”Mom, how many times do I have to tell you, call me Frank. I’ll be 11 in two days and it’s still Baby Frankie. And no, a cake mix is NOT okay. I’m sick and tired of getting squeezed out of a decent birthday just because I happened to be born

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on December twenty-fifth. I never have my own party. Most of the relatives just get one gift and let it count for birthday and Christmas. Now you don't want to bake a cake. I hate having a Christmas birthday! I just hate it!"

Mrs. Jackson put down the icing tube and glared at her son for a long minute. "Young man, that's mighty ugly talk just two days before Christmas. March yourself up to the attic right now and calm down. And while you're up there, I need you to look for the tree angel. The girls have gotten most of the ornaments down, but they couldn't find that angel we always put on top of the tree."

Frankie shuffled out of the kitchen and opened the door to the attic. He stopped on the bottom step to look into the living room where his three sisters were busy decorating the Jackson family Christmas tree. June and Jean were twins two years older than Frankie, and Emily was four. The three girls



"I get squeezed out of a decent birthday!"

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hung shiny balls on the tree as holiday music sang softly from the stereo.

"Hey, Frankie, we got tired of waiting for you. You're too late, now!" June called to her brother.

Jean chimed in, "Frankie, Mom says you have to get the angel down from the attic. For once in your life, would you please try to make it snappy?"

"Gr-eat," Frankie muttered. "They've done all the fun parts without me. I get squeezed out of everything around here. I'm stuck with a Christmas birthday and I'm stuck with two hog sisters. Everybody around here thinks I'm just a stupid sandwich. Sandwich Jackson—that's me!" He slammed the door and trudged up the steps.

Frankie played in the old trunks for a while, trying on weird hats and jackets that smelled of moth balls. "Hello there, Sandwich Jackson, sir," he said, saluting himself in a dusty mirror. With his finger, he



Frankie wrote his new nickname in the dust.

CHRISTMAS BEDTIME STORIES

reached up and wrote his new nickname in the dust, "Frank SANDWICH Jackson."

He sighed. It really was hard having a Christmas birthday. Everybody else got two special times a year, and he only got one. It just wasn't fair.

Frankie finally decided to start looking for the tree angel. He rummaged through boxes containing old shoes, buttons, and snapshots. He found the tea set June and Jean had when they were little and put it by the steps to take downstairs for little Emily. At last, climbing over ten years' worth of National Geographics, he found the box labeled ANGEL shoved into a tight corner under the roof. The box was crumpled and one corner had been crushed. Frankie pulled off the lid to see if the ornament was all right. The paint on the angel's faded face had chipped and one wing had broken off in the box.

"Poor old thing," Frankie thought. "Some Christmas angel you are. You've been



It was hard having a Christmas birthday.

CHRISTMAS BEDTIME STORIES

squeezed up in that box too long." A quick little smile crossed his face.

"Hey, you're a sandwich angel! Just like me, Sandwich Jackson!"

Memories of the cross words he had spoken downstairs to his mother returned. "Well, it's not fair," he said out loud, looking down at the angel. "I just wish I could have a regular birthday, not a Christmas birthday. Just once, I'd like a normal birthday."

Frankie blinked and looked harder at the broken old angel in his hands. Had he seen a slight movement in the box? And what was that, lingering in the chilly attic air? Was it the faintest echo of a tiny laugh? He shook his head to clear out the confusing thoughts. "You've seen too many Christmas movies, Sandwich old boy!" he told himself.

Mrs. Jackson's voice reached up the attic steps. "Frankie? Frankie, are you up there? Come down please, honey. I need to ask you a very important question."



“Hey, you’re a sandwich angel, just like me!”

CHRISTMAS BEDTIME STORIES

A very important question? Maybe his mom wasn't mad anymore. Frankie ran downstairs, leaving the angel behind in the attic.

"What is it, Mom?"

"I was wondering, sweetie, what kind of cake would you like for your birthday? Mocha Walnut Fudge or Pineapple Supreme with cherry-coconut icing?"

"I thought you were just going to make a mi—" Frankie stopped in mid-sentence and looked around. Something was wrong. Where were the Christmas cookies his mother had been baking? No messy bowls, no icing tubes, no red and green sprinkles were anywhere to be seen. Frankie hadn't been gone long enough for his mom to clean up this fast.

"Say, Mom, where are all those cookies you were baking?"

"Cookies? I haven't made any cookies lately," his mother said. "I was just planning your birthday dinner. So, what kind of cake do you want?"



Where were the Christmas cookies?

CHRISTMAS BEDTIME STORIES

"Um, a-a-, you pick, Mom," Frankie said, an uneasy feeling eating at his stomach. He dashed out of the kitchen.

The feeling grew. Where just half an hour ago Frankie had seen an almost-decorated Christmas tree, there was an empty corner. His sisters were spread out on the living room floor. June and Jean were finishing their homework and Emily was cutting pictures out of an old magazine.

Jean looked up at Frankie and smiled, "Hey, hey, hey! It's the birthday boy. Just two days left. We've got some great presents for you!"

"And wait until you see the cake Mom is going to make, Frankie. It's going to be the fanciest one ever!" June said.

"I've got something for my Frankie, too," little Emily added. "But it's a secret."

Three little beads of sweat popped out on Frankie's nose. What was going here? His sisters were never this nice to him. And



His sisters were being nice.

CHRISTMAS BEDTIME STORIES

where were the Christmas decorations they had placed all around the house last week?

Frankie started searching, opening doors and looking in closets. No tree, no wrapped packages, no spools of red and green ribbon, no wreath on the front door, no stockings to hang by the fireplace, not even Grandmother's fruitcake in the refrigerator. Even though he searched all afternoon, Frankie could not find one sign that Christmas was only two days away. June and Jean sure had done a good job of tricking him.

"Ha, ha, ha. Very funny, you guys. Now tell me where you've hidden all the Christmas stuff." Frankie demanded at the dinner table.

The conversation stopped for a second as the family gave him puzzled looks.

Then the talk picked right back up as if Frankie had never said a word.

Finally, right at bedtime, Frankie had a brainstorm. "Of course, the calendar and the radio! Why didn't I think of those sooner?"



No signs of Christmas anywhere.

CHRISTMAS BEDTIME STORIES

June and Jean might be able to hide every other Christmas thing in the house, but they can't change what's printed on the calendar, and they can't stop the radio stations from playing Christmas songs!"

Frankie rushed downstairs to check the calendar that hung by the phone in the dark kitchen. "Now, let's clear this whole joke up," he thought, peering at the December page in the dim light. He blinked and looked harder. What? He rubbed his eyes and looked again. There it was, the square labeled December twenty-fifth. No matter how hard Frankie looked, he couldn't see any trace of little red letters spelling out CHRISTMAS. He even rubbed the square with his finger. Could the twins have erased the letters or pasted a blank square on top? No.

Desperately, Frank whirled around to the radio his mother kept on the kitchen counter. He flicked it on and began twisting the dial madly. "Please, please," he thought.



Christmas wasn't marked on the calendar.

CHRISTMAS BEDTIME STORIES

"Let me hear just one note of Silver Bells or White Christmas!"

"Frank, is that you? What's the matter, son?" Frankie's dad walked into the kitchen to raid the refrigerator.

Frankie gulped, "Dad, um, I-a, I'm confused. What happens in two days?"

Frankie's father started laughing. "What's the matter? Are you afraid I'm going to forget your birthday? No way, pal!" And he slapped his son on the shoulder on the way out the door with a glass of milk.

Even though he had tossed and turned all night, Frankie woke up early. It was Christmas Eve, and he had an idea. A crazy one, but something he had to try.

He sprinted through the kitchen on his way to the attic door.

"You're frisky this morning," his mother noticed as she scrambled eggs for breakfast. "Ready for Big Eleven tomorrow?"

She didn't mention that today was Christ-



“Ready for the big Eleven tomorrow?”

CHRISTMAS BEDTIME STORIES

mas Eve. Frankie was already taking the steps to the attic two at a time in his rush to get up there and find the angel. All night, he had thought over the strange afternoon. How everything Christmas had disappeared when he found that old angel.

"It's crazy," he thought to himself. "But I'll try anything. It's Christmas Eve, for pete's sake! I've got to find that angel, and make a wish, and get Christmas back for tomorrow!"

By lunchtime, the attic was topsy-turvy. Frankie's face was filthy, and he had rammed a splinter under his thumbnail. No angel. No crumpled box. No sign that it had ever been up in the attic.

At this point, Frankie was frantic. What should he do? No one else in the family seemed to notice that suddenly there was no Christmas. All they could talk about was his birthday coming tomorrow.

He hopped on his bike and pedaled wildly down the street. The Walters had a wreath



It was a crazy idea, but it might work!

CHRISTMAS BEDTIME STORIES

on their door, and he could see a Christmas tree in the window at the Greenbergs'. The mailman was delivering packages down the street, and old Mrs. Maynard called out, "Merry Christmas, sonny!" as he zoomed by.

So it really was Christmas Eve, and tomorrow really was Christmas. Only at his house had Christmas disappeared into some black hole. Frankie raced home determined to fix things.

He spent the afternoon and evening locked in his room, wishing Christmas back. He tried every magic word he'd ever heard. "Abracadabra!" "Open Sesame!" "Eeny meeny miney moe!" "IwishIwishIwishIwish . . ." Frankie even wrote down promises:

"Just make tomorrow Christmas, and—

I'll never complain about a Christmas birthday again.

I'll never listen to June's & Jean's phone calls.

I'll keep my room really, really clean.



Christmas Eve everywhere else

CHRISTMAS BEDTIME STORIES

I'll eat Mom's broccoli casserole. . . ."

He filled up a whole notebook, but nothing changed.

"Today is Christmas Eve," he thought miserably. "We didn't go to candlelight service. We didn't eat our special midnight snack. Dad didn't read 'Twas the Night,' and we didn't hang up our stockings. What have I done? Oh, what have I done?" He cried himself to sleep.

December twenty-fifth dawned bright and clear. Frankie could tell, even with his eyes closed. He was afraid to open them.

"Let there be a tree," he pleaded silently. "Let there be stockings and presents. Oh, let it be Christmas!"

But what it was, was just his birthday. The first thing he saw when he opened eyes was a sign June and Jean had hung in his room in the night.

"Happy Eleventh Birthday, Frank!" it read, in crazy neon letters.

He went to the kitchen for breakfast.



“Just make tomorrow Christmas...”

CHRISTMAS BEDTIME STORIES

Remarkably, the family was acting like this was just another normal day. His mom and dad both hugged him and said happy birthday. Emily gave him a sticky oatmeal kiss. No one mentioned Christmas.

"Mom, Dad, I'm sorry!" Frankie cried silently. "Don't you know it's Christmas? Don't you realize what you're missing?" He looked at his sisters. "Emily, how could I have wished your Christmas away? June, Jean, what have I done to you? I'm so, so sorry!"

"Time for birthday presents!" the twins announced with a grin, bringing in arm loads of brightly wrapped packages. They were the best birthday presents ever - a remote control car from his parents, a boom box from the twins, basketball shoes from his grandmother, and a Louisville Slugger bat from the cousins. But Frankie was miserable. Nothing could make up for no Christmas.

"Hey, you forgot to open my present!" Emily



They were the best birthday presents ever!

CHRISTMAS BEDTIME STORIES

shoved a wrinkled brown lunch bag in front of her brother. A yellow feather had been stuck to the top of the bag with about ten staples and three pieces of tape. Another one of Emily's famous junk presents, Frankie chuckled.

"I found you something beautiful up in the attic," Emily said.

Frankie ripped the bag apart like a wild man. The tree angel fell out in his lap. Before his family's startled eyes, he held the angel up to his face and shook it tensely.

"I wish for it to be Christmas again! I wish for Christmas! I don't care that my birthday comes on Christmas, do you hear me, Sandwich Angel? Just make it Christmas, please! Just . . ."

Dots of color shifted and formed new patterns before Frankie's eyes. He was standing up in the attic, looking down at a broken angel in a crumpled box. He rushed downstairs, the box in his hands.

"Frankie, you found her! Girls, here's the



It was one of Emily's famous junk presents.

CHRISTMAS BEDTIME STORIES

angel for the tree!" Mrs. Jackson called.

Emily came running to the kitchen. "Oh, she's beautiful!" the four-year old exclaimed, reaching for the doll ornament.

"Listen, Emily," Frankie said. "We need to fix her before you can put her on the tree. Go find some glue and I'll put her wing back on."

As Emily scampered off, Mrs. Jackson came up behind her son and ruffled his hair. "You don't really mind your birthday being on Christmas, do you, honey?"

"No, I guess not. It really makes things special to have Christmas and birthday all sandwiched in together."

A tiny "ting," like the sound of a little golden bell came from the angel box.

"Did you hear that?" Mrs. Jackson asked. "What else is in that box, anyway?" and she reached for the angel.

Frankie just grinned. "Merry Christmas and Happy Birthday to us, Sandwich Angel!" he thought, handing over the box.



The ring of a tiny bell came from the box.



Santa is real!

Not Evan A. Mouse

I am one mouse who should need no introduction. I belong among the ranks of the great mice of history, like Dock from Hickory Dickory, and Sir Nipsy, who nibbled the lion free from his net. I, too, changed the course of world events. If it hadn't been for me, there would be no proof that Santa truly exists: no letters to the North Pole, no snacks set out on Christmas Eve.

Oh, you know my story, or at least one version of it. But you don't know my name, and it's all because of Professor Moore's poor penmanship. Let me set the record straight.

CHRISTMAS BEDTIME STORIES

I am Evan A. Mouse. Listen to these famous lines and you'll understand my frustration: "Twas the night before Christmas, when all through the house, not a creature was stirring, not even a mouse." My place in history blurred forever because of missed capital letters and a poorly written vowel. If only the line had been properly penned, "Not Evan A. Mouse," I wouldn't have to defend myself today.

First, my credentials. I am a member of "Mus Legendarius" what the scientific community calls legendary mouse for those of you not up on your Latin. We L.M.'s live extraordinarily long lives and, as I've said before, we find ourselves at key places in history. I was just a youngster in those days, beginning my life's work as a house mouse. It was my job to supervise the Moore household, not an easy task I tell you, because of the four humans who lived there.

First, there was Professor Clement Moore.



My place in history blurred forever.

CHRISTMAS BEDTIME STORIES

A teacher, he was forever leaving books, ink wells, and papers all over the house. It took many nibbles in his lecture notes for me to break him of this sloppy habit. Mrs. Moore had the human illness known in our trade as Female Mousaphobia. Her greatest fear was that I would take over her job in the home. When I would quietly remind the Professor to tidy up with a nibble here and there, Mrs. Moore would panic. She would go on a cleaning rampage for a week, just to get me out of the way. Women—who can understand them? The Moores' children, Bartley and Belinda, seemed to be normal enough for their race, loud and noisy. What more can I say? All human children look alike to me.

But back to the night in question, December 24, 1821. If you are familiar with Professor Moore's famous poem, you know how he portrays the events. Let me tell you what really happened. The Professor leads you to believe his home was a calm and peaceful



Professor and Mrs. Moore, Bartley and Belinda.

CHRISTMAS BEDTIME STORIES

place that Christmas Eve. Now I ask you, have you ever known any human dwelling to be quiet the day before Christmas? Last minute shopping, wrapping up gifts, gorging on goodies, relatives arriving by the dozens. Anything but peace!

Bartley and Belinda had picked at one another all day. Bartley would pin his little red stocking to the chimney, and Belinda would snatch it down and race around the house, waving it over her head. "Bartley believes in Santy Claus! Ha—ha!" At bedtime, the feathers flew in a horrendous pillow fight as those two jumped from bed to bed. Bartley got in one good swing that knocked out a loose tooth Belinda had been wiggling for weeks.

Professor Moore stomped out of his study, rubbing his temples. Mrs. Moore began shrieking, "I don't care if it is Christmas Eve! If I hear one more peep from the two of you . . ."



Christmas Eve merriment.

CHRISTMAS BEDTIME STORIES

I knew there would be no Merry Christmas if I, Evan A. Mouse, didn't do something. I sent the adults to bed with ear plugs and a bottle of aspirin. Getting the younger Moores to settle down took some doing. I used the oldest trick in the House Mouse Book of Human Child Management—bribery. You recall Professor Moore's line, something about sugarplums? I promised massive amounts of candy to the child who could fall asleep first. It worked like a charm.

At last, the household was quiet. I retreated to my observatory up on the roof where I had a first-rate telescope. The clear night promised to provide good viewing. I was looking at the constellation Orion when a strange movement in the heavens caught my eye. Fascinated, I watched as the speck darted from one planet to another. A careful recording of the movements showed that the speck, whatever it was, traveled to Mercury, Venus, and Mars in less than two hours. At

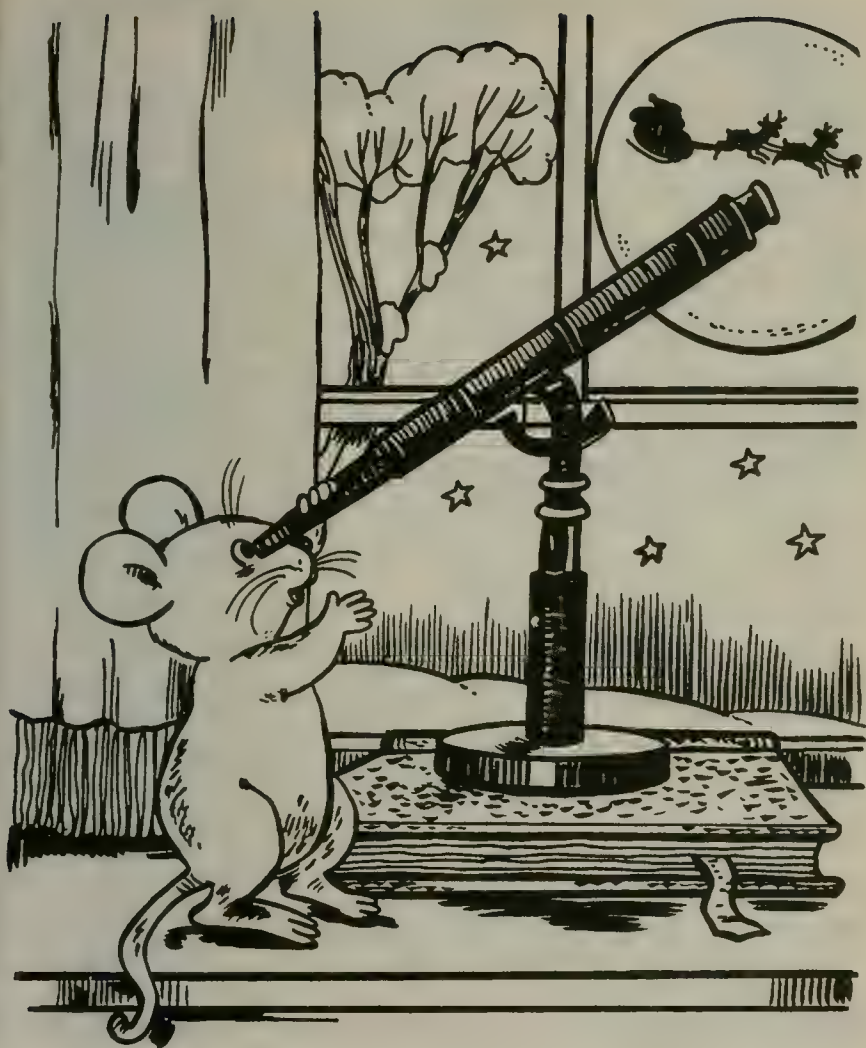


Ready for a long winter's nap.

CHRISTMAS BEDTIME STORIES

that point, the speck turned and headed directly for Earth. "Professor Moore should witness this phenomenon!" I thought, and made a mad dash to his bedroom.

The aspirin I had given him earlier had done its job. The Professor was out cold. He claims that a noise outside the house woke him up that night. Might I remind you of the ear plugs he wore to bed? Only I remember that it took a swift bite on the big toe to wake that man up! By the time the two of us poked our heads out the bedroom window, the speck had become large enough to identify. Instantly, I knew I was seeing first-hand something only whispered of in the halls of mousedom. It was the Great One himself, Santus Nikolais, Santa Claus. For generations, we legendary mice had come close to proving his existence, but no one had ever actually seen him in the flesh. And now I, Evan A. Mouse, was standing on the threshold of a major scientific breakthrough.



"Professor Moore should see this!"

CHRISTMAS BEDTIME STORIES

The way Professor Moore tells the story, the reindeer were lively and quick that night, and Santa called each one lovingly by name. But my memory has not failed. Fame and Fortune have not clouded my mind. Those reindeer barely made it up to our rooftop. They were totally exhausted. It was the tail end of their North American route. Santa himself practically fell out of the sleigh. "Um-a- Crasher. No, um, I mean, Cruncher . . . No, no, you. .what's your name? Um, reindeer . . . stay here and don't move until I get back!" Santa's scolding wasn't necessary. The minute their hooves had touched our roof, those deer were down and dozing. After three tries, Santa got his sack of toys up on his back and trudged over to our chimney. Somewhere south of New York, he had run into foul weather. His suit was plastered with sticky red mud. Messy, but it did make the trip down the chimney a quick one!



Those reindeer barely made it up to our roof.

CHRISTMAS BEDTIME STORIES

Downstairs, Professor Moore and I got our first close look at the Living Legend. The Professor remembers twinkling eyes and a nose red like a cherry. My superior powers of observation led me to notice more details. The Great One was suffering from a nasty cold. His eyes were watering, and he frequently wiped his runny nose on a handkerchief. Once again, I sprang into action, pushing Santa into the Professor's easy chair. First I filled the children's stockings, then I served Santa some hot chicken soup. Those few moments of rest and a dry pair of socks made all the difference that night.

I am convinced that Santa would not have been able to finish his route if I had not been there to give first aid.

Only one task remained, and that was to get the Good Gentleman back up the chimney to his transportation. Santa jumped, the Professor and I pushed from below, but it was hopeless. Finally, I pulled down the trap



A nasty cold!

CHRISTMAS BEDTIME STORIES

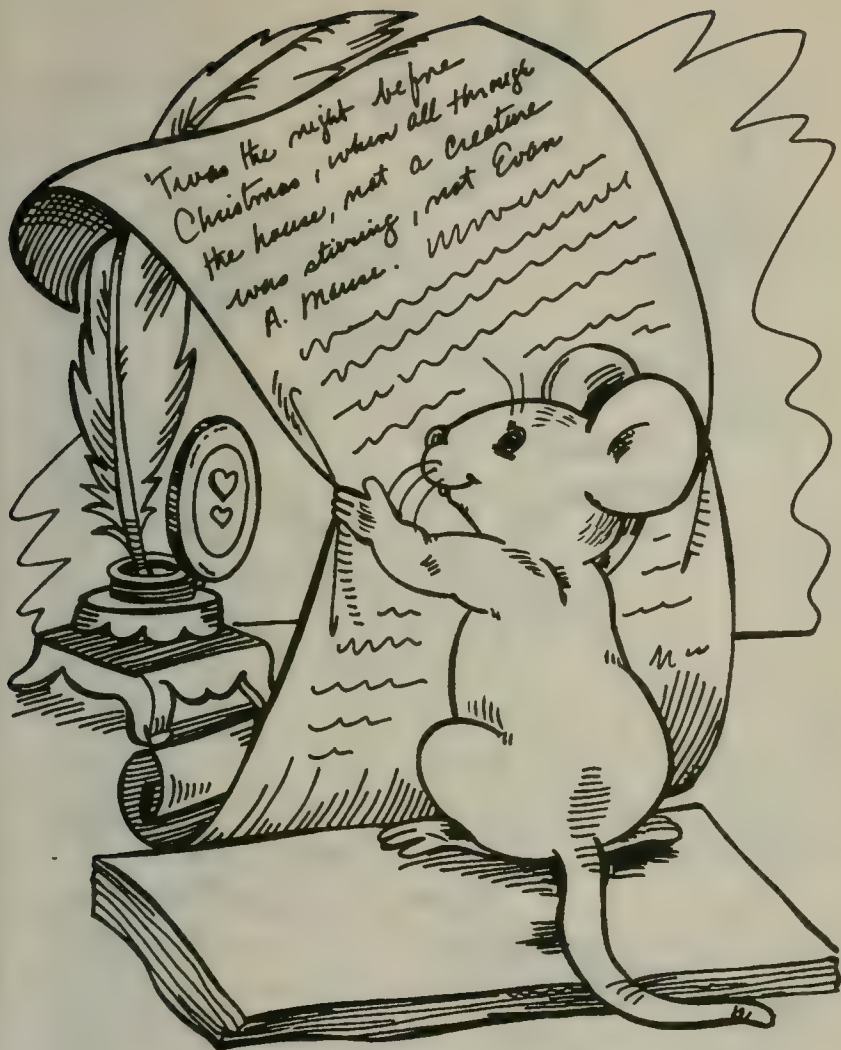
door to the attic and helped Santa climb out onto the roof. The reindeer galloped into lift-off. Imagine my thrill as we heard these words echo across the night sky:

"Happy Christmas to all at Professor Moore's house,

Special thanks to my good friend, Evan A. Mouse!"

The rest, as they say, is history. The Professor decided to write up his observations and a newspaper printed the article in 1822. Soon, people all over the world believed in Santa Claus and loving and giving. But who gets the credit for all this? Not Evan A. Mouse. All I want is a simple correction:

"Twas the night before Christmas,
when all through the house
Not a creature was stirring,
not Evan A. Mouse!"



All I want is a simple correction!



Today was Christmas Cake Day!

Pepper Cakes

*Hear, brethren, hear;
The hour of six is come.
Keep pure each heart,
Bring peace to every home.*

Anna Aust woke to the sound of six long blasts on the watchman's conch shell horn. She hated to leave her warm nest of quilts, but then she remembered. Today was Christmas Cake Day!

Anna threw back the heavy covers and swung her feet down. Shivering in her thin linen shift, she reached for the woolen stockings she kept under her pillow in the win-

CHRISTMAS BEDTIME STORIES

tertime. Anna thought there was nothing worse than bare feet on freezing floorboards. With her toes safe in the warm stockings, she ran across the room to where her petticoat and jacket hung from a peg on the wall. She yanked the ankle-length skirt down over her shift and stuck her feet into heavy leather shoes. Next came the fitted blouse called a jacket. Anna moved to the window so she could see to lace up the ribbon that kept the blue jacket closed in front. Around her neck she tied a white scarf called a handkerchief. Running a comb through her long hair, she quickly pinned it up on the back of her neck with hairpins. Last of all, she put on the white linen cap that all the girls and women of Salem wore, and tied the red ribbons under her chin.

The twelve-year old girl flew downstairs and through the kitchen to the back porch where a pitcher of icy water stood on the wash stand. The cold splashes took her



Anna dressed quickly in the cold bedroom.

CHRISTMAS BEDTIME STORIES

breath away, and it felt good to sit down at the kitchen table in front of the open fire. Her parents were waiting for her.

"Has my daughter forgotten how to walk, in a manner befitting a proper young Moravian lady?" Brother Gottfried Aust leaned over and kissed Anna on the forehead.

Anna blushed. "I'm sorry, Papa. But today's Christmas Cake Day, and I get to stay home from school to help Mama with the cakes!"

Brother Aust couldn't keep a small smile from dancing at the corners of his mouth. "I like your mother's cakes, too, Anna. But let us not forget the reason why she makes them. It is to share with others the joy of this holy season."

Anna joined hands with her mother and father in prayer before another day of hard work in Salem, a Moravian settlement in the wilderness of North Carolina.

Anna's first task was to stir the giant bowl



“Walk like a young Moravian lady.”

CHRISTMAS BEDTIME STORIES

of stiff brown dough. As she waited with a wooden spoon, her mother measured out the ingredients: butter, brown sugar, molasses, flour, salt, soda. From drawers in a tiny chest came the precious spices from faraway places that gave Christmas cookies their "bite." Cinnamon, ginger, cloves, a pinch of nutmeg, and just a dash of allspice.

"Is it time for the secret ingredient, Mama?" Anna asked eagerly. Her mother nodded and reached for the pot resting on the hearth. Slowly she poured out a cup of coffee left from breakfast and added it to the bowl of dough. Anna stirred carefully so she wouldn't splash.

Every cook in Salem had a secret recipe for Christmas cakes, some extra touch that she felt made her cakes the best. Mothers passed their secrets on to daughters, but no one outside the family was supposed to know exactly what made the cookies so good. Some cooks made mild Christmas cakes. Others



"Is it time for the secret ingredient?"

CHRISTMAS BEDTIME STORIES

added so much ginger, the cookies would sting your tongue. Sister Aust took pride in the fact that her Christmas cakes were a perfect blend of sweetness and spiciness, with the coffee adding a mysterious rich flavor her neighbors all seemed to like. At every Christmas gathering, Mama's cakes always disappeared first!

It was time to knead the dough. Mama took three or four handfuls of flour and dropped them on the tabletop. She would turn the dough out onto the flour and then press, and push, and punch, and squeeze until the dough felt just right. It was always hard work. At that moment, Johann Krause walked in, carrying an arm load of wood.

"Brother Aust told me to bring you some more firewood," the young man said. "He's had me chopping wood for the pottery all morning." The apprentice stacked the split logs in a big box next to the hearth, then turned to see what the women were doing.



It was time to knead the dough.

CHRISTMAS BEDTIME STORIES

"Cake Day!" he cried, and bent down over the table. Before Anna knew what was happening, Johann took a deep breath and puffed on the pile of flour. He dashed out of the kitchen, laughing.

Mama and Anna looked at each other. Both of them were covered with white powder, on their faces and on their necks, down their aprons, all over their arms and hands, even on the tops of their shoes.

"The rascal!" Sister Aust chuckled. "It's time we taught that young man a lesson. And I think I know just how to do it!"

Johann Krause worked with Papa in the pottery shed, learning how to shape and fire clay into the jugs, pots, and bowls that the people of Salem used every day. He was a good worker, Papa said, but he still had some growing up to do, even though he was already seventeen.

In the three years that Johann had been with the Austs, he had pulled hundreds of



"The rascal!" sister Aust chuckled.

CHRISTMAS BEDTIME STORIES

pranks, especially on Mama. Anna remembered when he tied a broom to Mama's apron strings as she stood working in the kitchen. When she moved, the broom hit her on the back-side! Another time, Johann turned a pig into the house. Mud got all over Mama's nice clean rooms, and Johann had to scrub the walls and floors. Last summer, Mama left three berry pies on the windowsill to cool when Johann came along and ate up all three. But Mama never stayed mad at him for very long. You just had to like someone who enjoyed good food as much as Brother Johann, Mama said.

"Anna, bring me the spice chest."

Sister Aust took a big pinch of black pepper from one of the little drawers and began to knead it into a handful of the cookie dough. When the dough was ready, she used a heavy wooden rolling pin to flatten it out. She rolled and rolled and rolled, until the handful of dough was spread paper thin.



Brother Johann certainly liked to eat!

CHRISTMAS BEDTIME STORIES

"Get the Christmas cake cutters and the pans, Anna."

The girl was horrified. "Mama, that was pepper! What are you doing?"

Sister Aust looked up from the rolling pin long enough to grin at her daughter. "You know how much Brother Johann likes Christmas cakes. We are going to make some special ones for him. He won't be able to eat too many of these cakes!" And she sprinkled another pinch of black pepper on the rolled-out dough.

Anna used the old tin cookie cutters that had come from Germany to cut shapes in the spicy dough: hearts, stars, rabbits, pigs, horses, trees.

Carefully, so the thin dough wouldn't tear, her mother lifted the shapes with a knife and placed them on baking sheets. These went into the brick oven at the side of the fireplace, where white-hot coals had been raked flat to bake the cakes evenly. Anna's job was to watch the pans. Christmas cakes



"Mamma, that's pepper!"

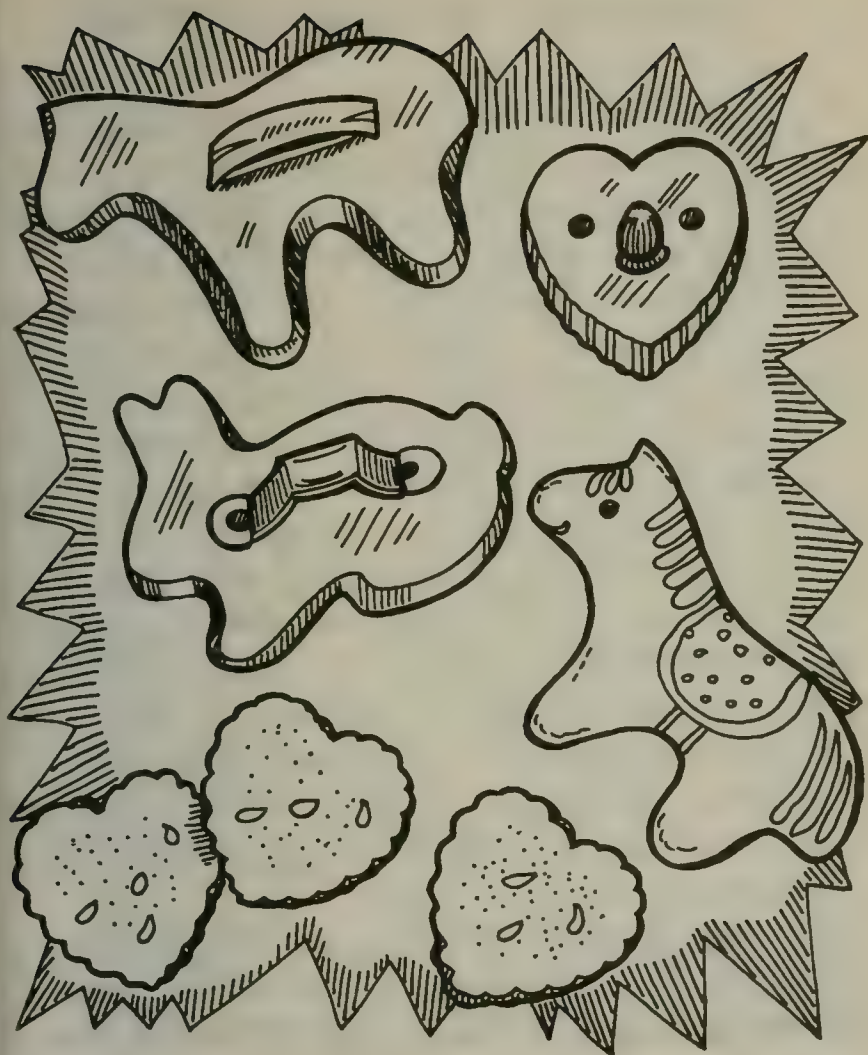
CHRISTMAS BEDTIME STORIES

were so thin, they would burn if you left them in the oven a minute too long.

But these cakes didn't burn. They turned a nice, rich, spicy brown, and Sister Aust used a long wooden handle to pull the baking sheet from the oven. After the cakes had been out for a minute, she lifted them off with a knife and set them on a plate to cool. They were beautiful-looking Christmas cakes, wafer thin, with crispy edges. Who would ever guess they were loaded with black pepper?

Mother and daughter giggled together, then broke a cookie in half. Anna ate her piece first. She clutched her throat and ran to the water bucket on the back porch. Sister Aust took a tiny nibble and smiled. She would save these pepper cakes for just the right moment, and then wouldn't Brother Johann be surprised!

It took the rest of the day to finish the baking. Anna and her mother rolled and cut and packed up more than a bushel of cook-



They were beautiful Christmas cakes.

CHRISTMAS BEDTIME STORIES

ies, enough to share with every guest who might visit during Christmas. Moravian hospitality had made the town of Salem famous, so there were always plenty of visitors.

As Christmas drew near, the bustling town got even busier. People still had everyday chores: milking cows, chopping wood, hauling water, cooking meals. But in between the chores, there was special work to do. The highlight of the holiday in Salem was the Christmas Eve lovefeast. This was a candlelight service held in the Moravian church, with wonderful singing and music. During the lovefeast, everyone, young and old alike, ate a sweetened bun and drank a mug of coffee fixed with milk and sugar. This showed that the people felt like one big family, together in love.

During December, the ladies of Salem filled molds with beeswax to make candles for the service. Others baked the big fluffy buns that would be served. Fathers and sons



Everyone awaited the Christmas lovefeast.

CHRISTMAS BEDTIME STORIES

practiced Christmas carols on trumpets, trombones, French horns or flutes. And there were choirs for every age group, so there was special music to learn.

Everyone in the Aust household had a church job this Christmas Eve. Anna was going to sing in the girls' choir, and Sister Aust was a "diener," a lovefeast server. Even Johann Krause would be serious for one night, holding a heavy tray of steaming mugs for the ladies to hand out. But this Christmas, it was Brother Aust, Papa, who had the most important job of all. Every year, a trumpeter was chosen to open the lovefeast service. He would stand on the balcony over the front door of the church and play hymns. This signalled that the service was about to begin. Papa felt very honored.

The day was a busy one. At their afternoon Vesper meal of cake and tea, Mama reminded Anna and Papa that they would not have supper until after the lovefeast.



Papa was to play the first hymn.

CHRISTMAS BEDTIME STORIES

She packed her white dinner dress in a basket and went to the church to begin brewing coffee. Anna had to go to one last choir rehearsal, and Papa was going to stay at home and practice his trumpet-playing. They would not meet again until after each one had finished his or her part in the lovefeast.

Two hours later, the people of Salem began gathering outside the door of the church for the Christmas Eve service. Anna stood with the other girls her age and waited for her father to play. It was cold! What was Papa waiting for? She looked up at the balcony. Papa held his trumpet in one hand; with the other, he was covering his mouth and coughing. He coughed and sputtered, and coughed some more. He raised the horn up to his lips, but had to stop and cough again. People standing near Anna began shuffling their feet and whispering. Papa coughed again, but finally got the breath he needed to blow into the trumpet. The first note wavered.



What was wrong with papa?

CHRISTMAS BEDTIME STORIES

Was Papa going to be all right? By the third note, he was fine, and the clear bright song rang in the night air.

Anna always loved Christmas Eve. Organ music, the carols, green branches at the windows, the strong smell of coffee, and most of all, candles. During the last song, the dieners handed a candle to each person in the church. Candlelight made even plain faces beautiful on Christmas Eve, Anna thought, as she looked around the room at her Salem friends and neighbors.

The peaceful hush of the lovefeast stayed with her all the way home. She met her parents outside the church and they walked silently down the dark street. But Anna remembered the minute they opened the door to their house.

"Papa, what was wrong with you? Why were you coughing so much? Why couldn't you play the trumpet? Mama, did you hear about Papa? What was it, Papa?"



The dieners handed a candle to each person.

CHRISTMAS BEDTIME STORIES

Brother Aust didn't say a word. He marched into the kitchen and picked up a tin bucket of Christmas cakes. He looked at Mama and Anna with fierce eyes.

"Oh, Gottfried," Mama breathed. "You didn't!"

Papa's eyes just grew darker.

"We put black pepper in those cakes to play a trick on Johann," Mama said. "Gottfried, I hid the bucket away so no one would eat them by mistake."

It turned out that Papa had gotten hungry right before time to go to church.

He prowled around the kitchen until he found the cookies Mama and Anna had fixed for Johann. The black pepper tickled and burned his throat badly, so he had a hard time playing the hymns for the Christmas Eve service.

Anna could feel bubbles of laughter bursting inside her throat, but she didn't make a sound. She could tell Papa wasn't ready to



“Oh Gottfried, you didn’t!”

CHRISTMAS BEDTIME STORIES

laugh about pepper Christmas cakes yet.
Maybe next Christmas, but not now!



Papa ate Brother Johann's pepper cakes!



I used to think Santa was just for kids.

The Fleet

Hey, I used to think Santa Claus was just for little kids, too. That's before I saw The Fleet with my very own eyes. It all started when my dad announced we would be spending Christmas with Uncle George, Aunt Rosa, and the monkeys, uh, I mean, cousins.

"Christmas in the country will be wonderful," my mother said. "We can have a nice old-fashioned holiday. No crowds, no traffic jams, just peace and quiet."

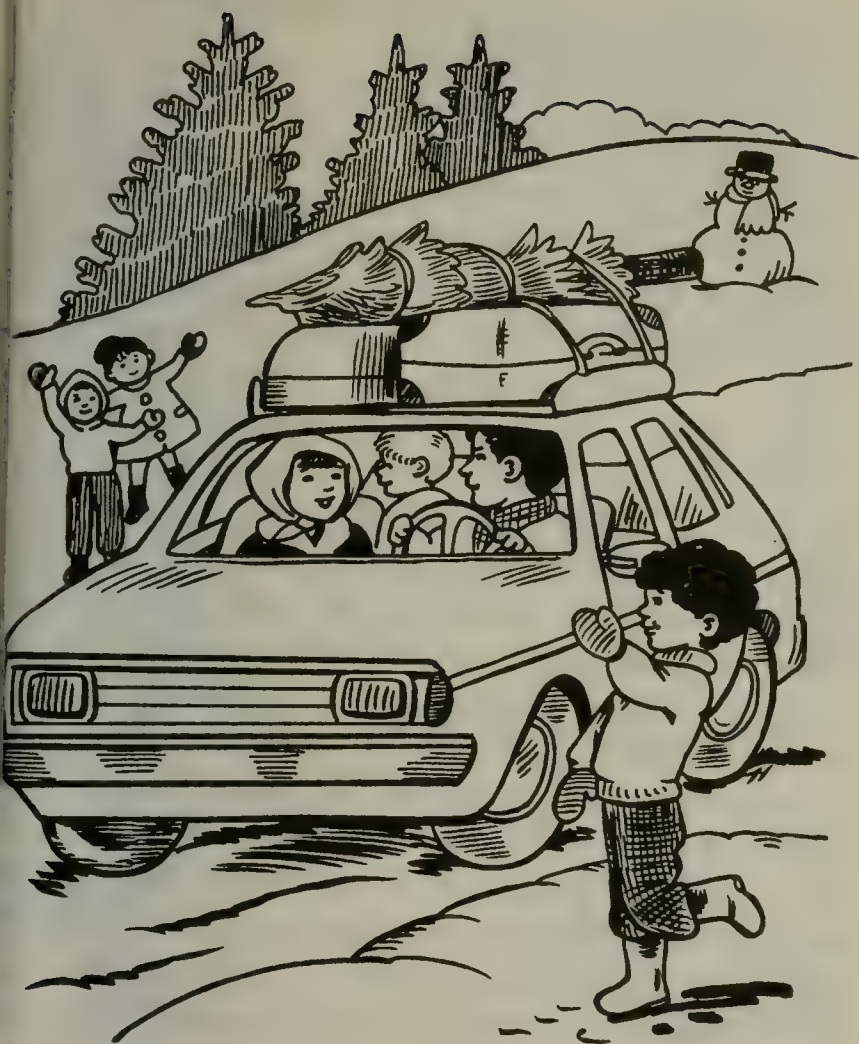
Peace? Quiet? Mom must have had someone else's cousins in mind, because ours yell louder than a squad of cheerleaders. Even

CHRISTMAS BEDTIME STORIES

when they're not rowdy, they're noisy. It's hard to believe three kids can make so much noise doing normal everyday things. BLAM! Oh, that was only sweet little Jason putting his storybook away. CRASH! Isn't it nice how Christine can stack the dirty dishes? KA-BOOM!! That's Danny, hanging his coat in the closet.

With Christmas just days away, the noise level at Uncle George's house rose a few hundred decibels when we arrived from the city. Those kids were excited about everything: the Christmas tree we brought on the top of our car, the cookies Mom fixed, the mysterious packages Dad unloaded from the trunk. Every little thing about Christmas got those kids more and more excited. Actually, it was kind of fun to watch all the commotion. I'm an only child, so things stay pretty calm around our apartment.

But there was one noise at Uncle George's I never could get used to, and that was the



Christmas got these kids excited.

CHRISTMAS BEDTIME STORIES

sound of horses at night. Uncle George and Aunt Rosa have two, J.R. and Pounder. On nights when it doesn't get too cold, the horses stay out in the pasture. Even with the bedroom windows closed, you can hear those horses snorting and snuffling all night long. And if they get to feeling frisky, it's even worse. They gallop around the pasture, and their hooves sound like drumbeats, only louder. So much louder, the bed shakes. The first time I ever slept in Danny's room, I thought those horses were going to break down the window and charge right into the house. Danny hasn't let me forget it, either. He calls me a scaredy cat city slicker.

This visit was no different. We got our pajamas on and climbed into Danny's bunk beds. After lights-out, that kid always talks my ear off until he falls asleep. Mom says it's because he looks up to me, me being the oldest cousin and all. This time, Danny was full of talk about their horses.



I heard horses, all night.

CHRISTMAS BEDTIME STORIES

"We'll have to go see J.R. and Pounder first thing in the morning, Adam. Dad and I have really been working with them the last couple of weeks. Boy, just wait until you see 'em run, you're gonna love it. Oh, but I almost forgot! You're a scaredy cat city slicker! You don't like J.R. and Pounder, do you, Adam. Well, we'll cure you of that this Christmas. We'll get some apples and go to the barn right after breakfast, and I'll let you feed J.R. and Pounder yourself. Would you like that, Adam? You think a city slicker can learn to do that? Adam? Are you asleep, Adam?"

I didn't say a word. Finally, Danny rolled over, and in a few minutes I could hear his soft regular breathing. At least I wouldn't have to listen to any more of his blabbermouth. But what he said about the horses worried me. My uncle and his whole family are horse-crazy, and they think everybody else should be, too. J.R. and Pounder are nice, I just don't want to get up too close. I'm



"You should see J.R. and Pounder go!"

CHRISTMAS BEDTIME STORIES

perfectly fine sitting on the fence, watching.

Da-Da-DUM! Da-Da-DUM! Da-Da-DUM!
Da-Da-DUM!

The sound of horses galloping outside in the pasture kept me awake long into the night.

At breakfast the next morning, the conversation was all about J.R. and Pounder.

"I want to show you the colts," Uncle George said to my dad. "They're four years old now. High-spirited, but gentle enough for the kids to drive. We've been hitching them to the cart for a while now. It's a pretty sight to see when they take off down the track."

Uncle George was right. J.R. and Pounder were pretty, with their heads up and their necks arched. Their glossy brown coats shone in the winter sun, and their black manes and tails blew in the wind. Dad and I perched on the fence and watched Danny hitch them to a buggy. He climbed in, and away they went. The horses' heads stretched



J.R. and Pounder sped around the track.

CHRISTMAS BEDTIME STORIES

out, and their slender legs flashed as they sped around the track.

"What are you going to do with them now that they're trained, George?" my dad asked. "I'm sure a matched pair like this would sell for big bucks."

Uncle George looked startled. "Sell J.R. and Pounder? Why, that would be like selling Danny, Christine, and Jason! Besides, they've been reserved for The Fleet this year. Okay, Danny, bring 'em in!" and Uncle George jogged off to help with the harnesses.

I looked over at Dad. "The Fleet? I thought a fleet was a bunch of ships. Is Uncle George sending J.R. and Pounder to the Navy?"

"Beats me," Dad shrugged.

The days before Christmas went by in a blur of cooking, eating, singing, watching sappy old movies on TV, tramping through the woods to cut holly and pine, doing chores with the cousins. Not at all the kind of Christmas you have in the city, but fun any-



Tramping through the woods

CHRISTMAS BEDTIME STORIES

way. Once, I remembered to ask Danny about the horses and The Fleet.

"You'll find out soon enough," he grinned.

I attacked him with kernels of popcorn we were stringing for the Christmas tree. "Tell me what The Fleet is, you country bumpkin, you!"

He counter-attacked with one of Aunt Rosa's throw pillows. "No way, stuck-up scaredy cat city slicker!"

Christine and Jason looked in to see what was going on. In seconds, the battle turned into a war. It was great. Kids rolling all over the floor, everyone tickling everyone else, screaming, shrieking, giggling. But then somebody knocked over a lamp and it fell with a crash. The grown-ups rushed in.

"You kids cut that out right now! Danny, Adam, I'm surprised at you two,"

Uncle George said. "You're old enough to know better. Another free-for-all like this and you'll have to miss the Star Walk."



The battle turned into a war.

CHRISTMAS BEDTIME STORIES

"Dad, you wouldn't!" Danny howled. "Especially not this year! We've got to see The Fleet!"

I still didn't know what The Fleet was, but I knew all about the Star Walk.

It's a Munson family Christmas tradition. Dad and Uncle George did it when they were growing up, and we do it now with our family. Every Christmas Eve, we take a walk outside and look at the stars. Of course, in the city, we have to pick a safe place to walk, and sometimes we don't actually see many stars. But it's a nice time to be by ourselves, to walk and talk. I was looking forward to a Star Walk in the country because I figured it would be a lot different.

The threat of missing the Star Walk kept all of us kids good all the way through Christmas Eve. At last, supper was over. Uncle George got up from the table and grabbed his coat. He motioned for Dad, Danny, and me to come with him. We walked



The Star Walk was a family tradition.

CHRISTMAS BEDTIME STORIES

to the barn. Uncle George handed us brushes, currycombs, and cloths.

"We don't have much time to get J.R. and Pounder groomed. Adam, you help me work on Pounder. Danny, show your uncle what to do with J.R."

Groomed for what, I wondered, but Uncle George spoke before I could get the question out.

"Now, Adam, I know you're a little nervous being this close to Pounder. Just come into the stall and let him get used to you."

Before I knew it, I was right in front of Pounder's gigantic face. His huge liquid eyes rolled when he saw me, and his lips moved constantly, showing square yellowish teeth. Pounder's head moved over to my shoulder. He made a little snorting sound and blew on me. I was paralyzed.

Uncle George slapped me on the back. "See there, Pounder likes you. Here, you brush the shoulder and the flank while I work on



I was paralyzed.

CHRISTMAS BEDTIME STORIES

his hooves. Use nice long strokes in the same direction that the hair grows."

I couldn't believe it, but Pounder stood there and let us work on him for almost an hour. He was beautiful when we were through, his coat shining, the tangles in his mane and tail all combed out. Uncle George put some oil on a little brush and polished the hooves until they looked like black patent leather. Over in the next stall, Dad and Danny were finished with J.R.

"Now for the final touch," Uncle George said.

He went in the tack room where all the saddles and reins are stored. We heard the jingle of bells. Uncle George brought out two red leather bridles trimmed with ribbons and little silver bells.

"Wow!" Danny exclaimed. "I've never seen those before. Where'd you get 'em, Dad?"

"Special delivery from someplace up North," Uncle George winked.



Pounder let us groom him for almost an hour.

CHRISTMAS BEDTIME STORIES

We led J.R. and Pounder into the paddock next to the barn. As Uncle George closed the gate, he reached over with an apple for each horse.

"Tonight's the night, fellas. Do old George proud out there!"

Mom, Aunt Rosa, Christine, and Jason met us by the barn with flashlights and quilts. We went a little ways down a dirt road and climbed up a small hill. The stars were out, and dark farmland stretched all around us. Aunt Rosa passed out the quilts and we sat down in a cozy huddle.

"I see the Big Dipper!" Dad called out.

"Too easy!" said Uncle George. "Bet you can't find Cassiopeia!"

Everybody started pointing out their favorite stars. I learned some new ones I don't think I'd ever seen in the city. From under the quilts, Aunt Rosa produced a thermos of hot chocolate, and we sipped and talked. Finally, Uncle George checked his watch.



"Bet you can't find Cassiopeia!"

CHRISTMAS BEDTIME STORIES

"Okay, everybody, it's almost time. Find the Milky Way."

Almost directly overhead, the Milky Way stretched across the sky like a silver highway. Individual stars twinkled in the broad band of light, giving it a magical, sparkling look. Then, from the pasture by the barn, we heard excited snorts and whinnying. We could hear J.R. and Pounder paw at the ground.

"Is something wrong with the horses, George?" Mom asked.

Uncle George didn't answer, he just kept looking back and forth from the pasture up to the Milky Way. Suddenly, his arm shot up.

"Look, there it is! It's The Fleet! They're coming for J.R. and Pounder!"

High up in the sky, galloping across the Milky Way, were hundreds of horses.

Starlight flowed around smooth bodies, and manes blew back in the nightl wind of their speed. Dainty feet seemed to barely touch down as the horses galloped across the sky.



In the sky were hundreds of horses.

CHRISTMAS BEDTIME STORIES

We could see all kinds of horses in the herd, sleek Arabians, Clydesdales, quarter horses, thoroughbred racers, even Indian ponies. Each horse wore a red leather bridle like the ones we had put on J.R. and Pounder.

The nickering over in the pasture grew louder. We heard an explosion of hooves hitting the ground. Seconds later, our horses were headed up, galloping through the starry night towards the Milky Way! The herd above us paused and waited for J.R. and Pounder to join them. Then they were off, thundering down the heavenly trail, leaving a cloud of stardust behind. In just a few seconds, they were out of sight. The night sky was peaceful and silent once more, as if nothing had disturbed it for ages.

It took me more than an hour to make sense of all I had seen. Everyone started talking at once, and I asked a million questions. Here, finally, is what I figured out:

1. Most of us have it wrong: Santa uses



It's a great honor to join the Fleet.

CHRISTMAS BEDTIME STORIES

horses, not reindeer, for his sleigh.

2. Just on Christmas Eve, the horses chosen for The Fleet can gallop through the air.

3. Santa's journey around the world is so long and difficult, he goes through many teams of fresh horses.

4. Someone from the North Pole had called Uncle George before Christmas and reserved J.R. and Pounder.

5. It is a great honor to be chosen for The Fleet.

6. Once a horse has ridden with The Fleet, he is forever changed.

I might add that once a person has seen The Fleet, he also is forever changed. My opinion of horses has completely changed. They're my favorite animal now. I'm on friendly terms with all the police horses that patrol the city here. I also take Santa Claus very seriously. Believe me, I BELIEVE. After all, I saw the great round-up in the sky with my very own eyes. I don't care how old I get



Horses are my favorite animal now.

CHRISTMAS BEDTIME STORIES

to be, every Christmas Eve from now on, you'll find me outside, looking up at the stars.

Wild horses couldn't keep me away!



Every Christmas Eve I look up at the stars.



An empty packing crate for a desk.

Crayon Box Christmas

Late one night, a young girl named Cathy sat up alone, coloring a large wreath she had cut out of cardboard. Boxes and bundles stood piled in the center of the small, dark apartment. Cathy used an empty packing crate for a desk. It was the end of moving day, and it was Christmas Eve.

She girl had lost count of the times she and her mother and her younger sister had moved. Too many, that's for sure. No matter where they moved, nothing changed. Their bad luck just moved with them. This time, the factory where her mother had been

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working went out of business, so they packed up and drove to a new city. To check out the possibilities, her mother had said. But moving took most of her mother's last paycheck. That meant no money for a Christmas tree or presents, not even a wreath for the front door. That's why Cathy sat up late this evening, coloring the cardboard wreath she had cut from an empty box.

The only light in the room came from a desk lamp she had unpacked. It cast a round golden glow on the surface of the moving crate. In the circle of light gleamed one hundred and thirty-two new crayons, their waxy points sharp and shiny. Crayons were the only good thing about this day, she thought.

The crayons had been a going-away Christmas present from a friend. Because Cathy moved so often, she didn't like to make friends, but this last time she had met someone different. Someone who liked to draw as much as she did, someone who saw

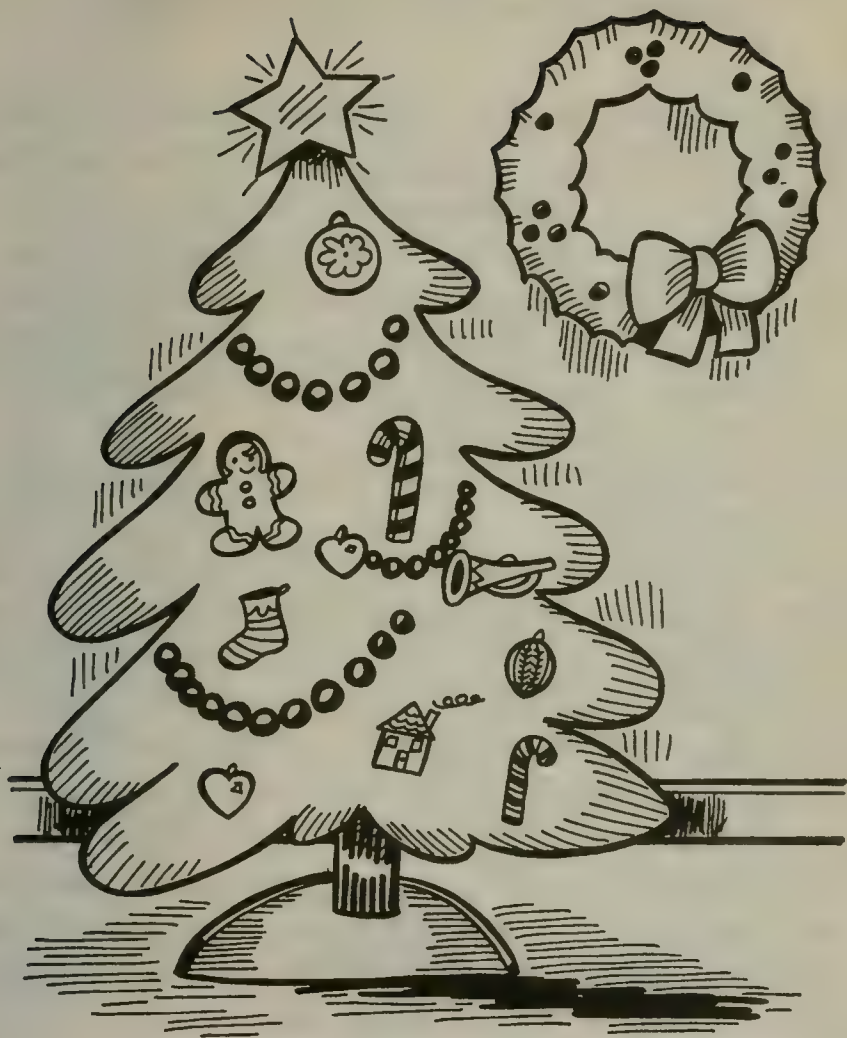


Possibilities in a box of crayons.

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possibilities in her pictures. Someone she missed already. Someone who knew she would like a deluxe box of crayons for a present. Cathy had always liked crayons, even after other kids her age had graduated to fancy felt-tip markers and paints. She liked how the crayons looked, lined up in the box like little soldiers standing at attention. She liked their waxy smell, and she liked the names of the colors: goldenrod, carnation pink, sea green, mulberry, raw umber. Most of all, she liked the way crayons felt: the soft paper wrapper, the weight of the round stick in her fingers, the picture ideas that seemed to flow down her arm and into her hand. There were so many possibilities in a new box of crayons.

She worked hard on her coloring. The plan was to finish the cardboard wreath, and then make a large cardboard Christmas tree. If they couldn't afford a real tree, they might as well have a homemade one, cut from the



She finished her home-made decorations.

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biggest moving box she could find. At least there would be something special for her sister to see on Christmas morning.

The hours passed, and Cathy colored on. At the stroke of midnight, she had just finished the last ornament on the cardboard Christmas tree when a voice called softly from the open crayon box.

“Psst, girl! Take me out, big girl! I need to talk with you!”

Cathy looked closely at her crayon box. All the crayons looked normal, except for a brown one in the corner, a color she had not used yet. Somehow, that crayon looked glossier than the others, more alive. Carefully, she pulled it up from its spot in the box. The wax stick came to life in her hand, little brown arms and legs sprouting out of the paper wrapper. A sassy brown face grinned at her from under a pointed brown hat.

“Who are you?” Cathy gasped.



"I'm Sepia!"

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"I'm Sepia," the little crayon lady chuckled. "See, it says so right on my wrapper."

"You— you're —real!" Cathy couldn't believe she was talking to a crayon.

"Of course I am. How do you think you big people draw pictures?

All by yourselves? With those clumsy giant hands of yours? Don't be ridiculous! We crayon people guide your fingers and make it possible. Why, if it weren't for us, you could not have drawn such a beautiful wreath and Christmas tree tonight."

Cathy thought about this strange idea for a minute. "Well, I thank you then, Miss Sepia," she said slowly. "I'm glad you helped me with the cardboard tree. It's the only one my family is going to have this Christmas."

"Ah, that's where you're wrong," smiled Sepia gently. "On this Night of All Possibilities, my dear child, you have been granted a special favor. Watch!"

Standing in Cathy's palm, Sepia turned



"We crayon people guide your fingers."

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and bowed low in the direction of the home-made Christmas tree. Suddenly, streaking from every corner of the dark room, flashes of color gathered above the cardboard cut-out. For a brief second, she could see a shimmering rainbow, and then the colors melted and sank into her tree. But it was no longer just a crayon tree, it was the largest, greenest, freshest, real Christmas tree Cathy had ever seen!

Next, the brown crayon lady pointed her hat at the girl's cardboard wreath. More flying colors gathered and transformed the artwork into a lovely full circle of real, fragrant evergreens.

The girl stared, first at the real tree and wreath, then at Sepia. "Oh, thank you! Thank you so much!"

Sepia chuckled, "There's more, if you can draw it, my dear. Is it Possible you could do a picture to give to your sister on Christmas morning?"



"Tonight is the night for All Possibilities."

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Cathy's eyes opened wide. "You mean . . .?"

Sepia nodded. "Tonight, all the Possibilities in the crayon box will come alive for you. Now, what will you draw for your sister?"

Cathy looked over the crayons waiting in the box. A wonderful Christmas picture started to take shape in her mind. Midnight blue for a dark winter sky, and silver for millions of tiny winking stars. Pearl white for a glistening mountain of snow. Cinnamon brown for the bark of trees loaded with lemon drops and tangerine candies. Ruby red, emerald green, and amethyst for jeweled birds singing in the branches. She reached for her crayons. The picture flowed out of her fingers and onto a piece of the moving box cardboard.

"Excellent," Sepia whispered. She bowed in the direction of the drawing and the winter scene came to life before them. It was so real that Cathy felt snowflakes brush against her cheek, and she heard a ruby car-



She drew a wonderful picture for her sister.

CHRISTMAS BEDTIME STORIES

dinal call from a lemon drop tree.

Next, her mother's picture. Cathy closed her eyes for a minute. Then she reached for every warm, comfortable, delicious color in the crayon box. Peach, melon, apricot, violet. Salmon, banana, orchid, clover, and spring green. Beneath her fingers bloomed a bountiful feast in the grass. A nod from Sepia, and piles of luscious fruit filled the room. Carnations and violets and the smell of fresh-baked bread perfumed the air.

The two drawings would make Christmas gifts never to be forgotten.

Now Sepia spoke quickly, "Listen, my dear, before our moment passes. My special gift to you is Seeing Possibilities. You have always been able to See Possibilities in a box of crayons. Now, think larger! Draw a picture of a big, wonderful life for yourself, and live it! Look for all the great possibili. . ."

And the lively little woman turned back into an ordinary brown crayon.



And now a picture for her mother.

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Laughter, hugs, and tears of joy greeted Cathy on Christmas morning. Her mother and her younger sister were astonished to see the magnificent real tree and the handsome green wreath on the front door. Even more wondrous were the two special gifts, drawings so real you could taste and touch and smell them. It was an incredible day.

As Cathy lay in bed that night, thoughts of her own Christmas present ran through her head. She touched the crayon under her pillow. Possibilities? And as she fell asleep, a little brown voice seemed to speak in her dreams. "See the Possibilities, my dear! Possibilities for great drawings. Possibilities for new friends. Possibilities for a happy family. Possibilities for you!"



They were amazed to see a real Christmas tree.



December 25, 2102

The Best Christmas Gift in the Universe

“How does it look, Wringle?” Santa bent over the little man scooping snow into a tester of three clear plastic tubes.

“Too early to tell yet, sir. We should know something in exactly—” Wringle clicked his watch—“47 seconds.”

Santa bit nervously on the ends of the bristly white hairs that poked out over his upper lip. “I just have a feeling this is going to be the year.”

Wringle peered into the tester. The snow in the first tube was slowly turning a bril-

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liant turquoise blue. The snow in the second tube was orange, and the third tube remained white.

The bulky man and his child-sized assistant stood on top of an industrial complex in New Dawn City, on what had once been the most polluted spot on Planet Earth. The sun was just beginning to peep over the horizon. It was Christmas Day, December twenty-fifth; the year was 2102.

Wringle's watch beeped, and he switched on a thermometer-like probe he had been holding. Inserting it in the tube of turquoise snow, Wringle muttered under his breath, "Come on, baby, give me a Go. Give me a Go for Santa."

Suddenly the probe let out a high-pitched tone and a green light flashed at the top. Wringle's hand shook as he removed the probe.

"You've done it, sir! You've done it!"

"Not so fast, Wringle. We have to pass all three purity tests. What do the other two read?"



"I have a feeling this is the year!"

CHRISTMAS BEDTIME STORIES

Wringle repeated the test twice and got the tone and the green flashing light each time. He and Santa stood wordless for a long minute, each gripping the other's hand. Tears filled their eyes. Both men had worked hard and waited long for this moment.

Santa broke the stillness. "Well, we know what we have to do now, Wringle. Let's get to it. I hope you will accompany me to the Christmas Gathering?"

"Oh, sir! I never dreamed . . . What an honor . . . Sir, of course I will come!"

The two grinned at each other and turned to the steaming pink sleigh shuttle parked behind them. Wringle ran to the control panel and clicked on the autocleanser while Santa opened a storage bin at the back of the sleigh. He pulled out eight silver cartridges about the size of bullets.

"Do you think eight atomic reindeer will get us there?" he asked Wringle.

Wringle peered up at the sun. "Yes, sir,



Getting ready for a trip to the sun.

CHRISTMAS BEDTIME STORIES

that should push us up at about EV28, plenty of time to make the Gathering.”

The sleigh cleansed of snow and mud, stood quivering and hissing ready for its next precious cargo—100% pure Earth snow. Santa and Wringle pulled shovels from the sleigh’s tool bin and began loading the white frozen crystals into a huge bag in the hold.

“Bet the guys up at the Pole never thought we would be doing this today,” laughed Wringle as he stopped to catch his breath for a second.

“Hm, I hope they are resting by now.” Santa said, mopping his forehead. “All the elves worked extra hard this season, including you, Wringle. I’ve never seen the sleigh packed higher than last night. I’m tired, too. The delivery route seems to get longer each year. But shoveling snow this morning is one job I’m glad to do.”

“What do you think the Overlord will say, sir? Will he be surprized? And what about



"This is the one job I'm glad to do!"

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the other Santas? What do you think they'll say?"

Santa let out his famous laugh, "Ho, ho, ho! There's only one way to find out, my friend. Let's get cracking!" He dug down deep in the snow.

Half an hour later the sleigh shuttle was filled to the brim with snow and the hatch closed tightly. Inside, Santa and his first mate donned helmets and strapped themselves in for their journey. Exhaustion pressed down on them like a heavy blanket.

"At least we can catch forty winks on the way up," yawned Santa. "This is one Gathering I plan to enjoy."

In a silent sh-oo-sh, the sleigh shuttle lifted from the Earth with seven million pounds of thrust. In a matter of seconds, the ship had achieved Escape Velocity, the speed needed to leave Earth's gravity and to travel to the Sun. Although the human race had made enormous strides in space travel, colo-



Taking a long winter's nap.

CHRISTMAS BEDTIME STORIES

nizing the Moon, landing on Mercury and Mars, this journey to the Sun was beyond their realm of belief.

In this advanced civilization, parents still told their children stories about Santa Claus, but they were quaint tales of an old-fashioned rocket that buzzed around the planet delivering packages. What humans didn't know, had never known, was that their Santa was real. His task on their planet went far beyond simply bringing Christmas joy. Their Santa had been sent from the Sun by the Overlord himself to manage, guide, and protect this third member of the solar system. Indeed, the Earthlings knew nothing of the Overlord. They still clung to the idea that theirs was the only life form in the galaxy. In spite of the fact that transmissions arrived daily from other planets. In spite of the fact that their astronauts had stepped over crater cities on Mercury and photographed ice cap colonies on Mars. In

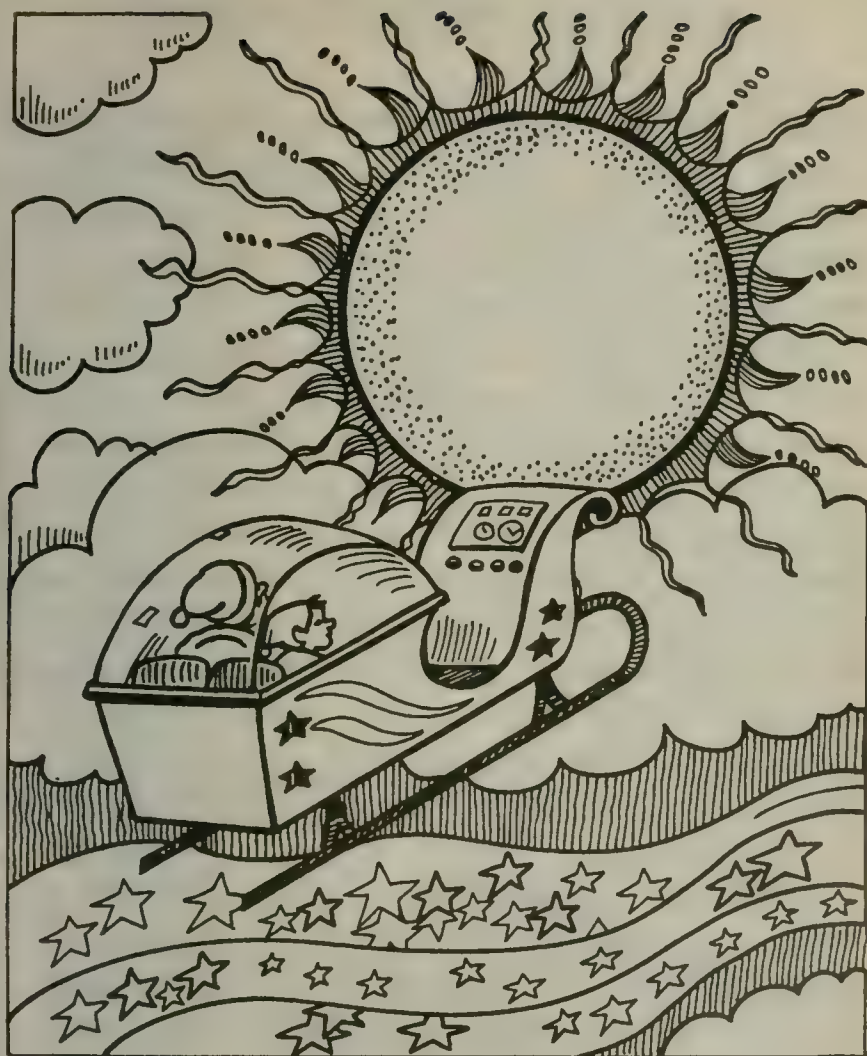


There is life everywhere out there!

CHRISTMAS BEDTIME STORIES

spite of the fact that the stories about Santa Claus himself lived on, from the earliest days of recorded Earth history to the present. With all these clues before them, the Earthlings simply could not see, did not want to see, the wealth of life teeming in their solar system.

Now, from this tiny corner of the galaxy, Santa Claus and Wringle made their way toward the Sun. The journey was beyond speed; it was all about light and color. Their ship quickly left the blackness of Earth's atmosphere and entered an interplanetary realm of shifting greens and blues. As the shuttle drew closer and closer to the Sun, the colors blazed brighter and burned away at the tiny vehicle and its riders. Humans had always feared these burning rays. They had tried to keep them out with protective shields, not realizing they were shutting off the very power source that could take them to new worlds and beyond. First, the ship



The sun burned away all that was old.

CHRISTMAS BEDTIME STORIES

blazed purple and then red as the temperatures climbed higher and higher. Heading straight for the Sun's corona, the metal hull turned blue-white, burning at degrees inconceivable to Earth's scientists.

Changes were also happening inside the ship. As Santa and Wringle slept on, the heat from outside crept in and burned away at their skin, first turning it brown, then blue-black, and finally, a rainbow color like that of soap bubbles, a shade that mirrored all the colors dancing outside the ship. The intense rays were like a cleansing, a burning away of all that was old and soiled and imperfect. Like butterflies emerging from their cocoons, Santa and Wringle became new creations.

Millions and millions of miles slipped by. Soon, the sleigh's atomic thrust slowed. For a short while, the shuttle rocked in limbo, still moving forward, but slowly and gently. Had Santa and Wringle been awake and



Santa and Wringle became new creations.

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looking out a porthole, they would have seen eleven other ships also rocking, like gentle giant cradles. Fingers of solar wind reached out and tickled the ships, drawing them gently ever closer to the surface of the Sun. Each ship hovered above the corona until, with a whoosh, the dark hollow of a sunspot would open and the ship would dive deep in to the Sun's core. Whoosh, whoosh, whoosh, twelve times a different sunspot opened and twelve times a ship vanished from the corona, leaving a brilliant tail of energy blazing behind.

Deep in the core, the shuttles docked and the hatches opened. Down from the ships came the twelve Santas of the solar system, rested and with faces rainbow bright. There was Santa Claus from Earth and Santa Maus from Mercury; Taus and Draus from Venus and Mars. From Jupiter came Faus;

Paus from Saturn; Kaus, Jaus, and Baus from Uranus, Neptune, and Pluto. Santas



The twelve Santas of the solar system.

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from planets not yet known to Earth were also there: Gaus, Naus, and Vaus from Tarsus, Omom, and Ghee. Their rainbow faces sparkled as they greeted one another with hugs and handshakes. There had been many long lonely days since the last Christmas Gathering.

Behind them an army of elves swarmed over the sleighs, unloading the precious cargo brought by each Santa. There were jewel eggs from the rings

of Saturn, volcanic honey from Mars, meteor beetles from Omom, and more. All the delights of the solar system were now shooting down a transport tube to the Overlord's Imperial Kitchens. After the serious work of the Gathering was done, what a Christmas feast these Santas would have!

Claus and Wringle watched as elves pushed their huge thermal bag of snow out onto the transport tube beltway. The clasp on the top of the bag remained sealed.



All the delights of the solar system.

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Wringle giggled, "Tee-hee! No one knows, do they? I'll bet they think you've brought reindeer moss again! Hee-hee!! They sure will be surprized at the Christmas banquet! They don't know how hard you've worked, cleaning up Earth's pollution so the sn—"

Claus clapped a hand over Wringle's mouth and turned to a Santa walking over to their sleigh. "Greetings, Brother Gaus. How goes it on Tarsus?"

The two Santas walked away together, discussing the work on their planets. Wringle restrained himself until they were out of sight and then took off down the beltway after the bag of snow. With a flying leap, he landed right on top of the bag and rode grandly down to the Kitchens. After all, he giggled to himself, he was delivering the Christmas present of the evening!

Solemn tones echoing from a gamma ray organ brought silence to the Imperial Solarium. Reverently, the Santas bowed their



Special delivery to the Imperial Kitchens!

CHRISTMAS BEDTIME STORIES

heads as the Overlord entered and took his place at the head of the polished meteorite table.

"Praise be to our High Lord Creator," said the Overlord.

"The Father and Mother of all Life, our High Lord Creator," answered the twelve Santas.

Folding his old sun gold hands across his chest, the Overlord gave each Santa a long probing look. This ancient being who ruled the solar system for the High Lord Creator had been a Santa himself long long ago. He knew the tears and the thorns each Santa faced in guiding his planet. It was not an easy job.

One by one, the Santas presented their reports. The Overlord listened to accounts of war among the insect-men of Mars, and that a mystery disease was killing the diamond trees of Pluto. He heard how Santa Vaus had taught the Gheeites to sing, and that Jaus and his Neptuners were finally at peace.



One by one the Santas presented their reports.

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Then it was time for Earth's account. The Overlord turned to Santa Claus, "How are things on our dear third planet, Claus?"

Santa Claus told of medical cures for that dreaded Earthling disease, the bad cold. He talked of schools where all of Earth's children learned rudiodeology. He told how the lost forests of Sherwood had been replanted, and that the Earthlings at last were recycling their atomic waste. Santa Claus stopped speaking and looked down.

"Is that all, Claus?" the Overlord asked, searching the Santa's face with his wise old eyes.

It was all Santa Claus could do to keep the secret of the pure Earth snow from showing on his face.

"Hm, I see. Well, Claus, the High Lord Creator will be pleased with little Earth. Good work."

The meeting continued until all reports had been given. At last, the Overlord stood.



"Is that all, Claus?"

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"Well done, my loyal workers. Let us proceed to the Imperial Banquet Hall."

The wonderful sights and heavenly smells that awaited them in the Hall were beyond words. Tables piled high with treats from every planet lined the room. Stomachs began to rumble as the Santas eyed the delicious dishes.

But before the feasting came the presentation of the Christmas Gift to the Overlord.

Whispers buzzed around the room.

"What is the Gift to be?"

"Which planet sent it this time?"

"I haven't heard a word about the Gift!"

"We do have a Gift for the Overlord, don't we?"

"Where is the Gift?"

Wrangle stepped proudly out of the crowd, carrying a covered serving dish. This was his moment of glory. With a flourish, he bowed low before the

Overlord and then lifted the lid. There,



Wringle's moment of glory!

CHRISTMAS BEDTIME STORIES

piled high on the dish, was a treat not seen at the Christmas Gathering for over a century—sparkling white snow cream from Earth, a frozen concoction of cream and sugar and pure snow. The most delectable dish Planet Earth had to offer.

The buzzing began again, this time louder and with great excitement.

“He’s finally done it”

“Congratulations, Claus! Good work!”

“Imagine, after all these years, clean snow!”

Silently, the Overlord reached for the spoon held out by Wringle. He lifted a scoop up to his lips and slowly tasted the snow cream with eyes closed. No one dared breathe. At long last, he opened his eyes and smiled.

“The best Christmas Gift in the Universe!” he proclaimed and held the dish high amid cheers from all the elves and Santas.

Over the heads of the crowd, the Overlord and Santa Claus looked into each other’s



“The best Christmas gift in the Universe!”

CHRISTMAS BEDTIME STORIES

eyes. Each knew what an accomplishment this was. At long last, Earth was free from the curse of pollution. Santa and the Earthlings had given a healthy planet back to the Universe.

The High Lord Creator be praised!



Earth was free from the curse of pollution.



The longest, darkest night of the year.

John Franklin's Story

It was December twenty-first, the longest, darkest, stillest night of the year at the North Pole. Months had passed since the animals had seen true sunlight. Up until a few weeks ago, a lighter shade of gray would lift the blackness for a few minutes at noon. But now, not a particle of light penetrated the cold. The dark sky bent down to the ice below in a frozen dome of silence.

It was to escape this silence that the animals gathered now outside a small solitary house. Built from blocks cut out of packed snow and hardened by wind and frost, the

CHRISTMAS BEDTIME STORIES

house had a single large room with a window on one side and a smoke hole in the roof. Attached were several smaller rooms used for storage. A long, low tunnel served as a passageway into the house, and from out of this tunnel crawled a man.

Wearing heavy fur garments, the man walked over to the animals waiting at a tall wall of ice.

"Ah, it is good to see you, little friends. Thank you for joining me tonight.

The strength of your friendship will cheer me on the long journey I am about to make. Knowing you are here waiting, I will return home with a gladdened heart."

The animals watched the man with loving eyes, but they kept their distance in quiet respect. The man continued speaking, looking out into the dark sky as if he had forgotten the animals were there. He paced back and forth in front of the wall of ice. It was taller than the man himself, and it glistened



“Your love will cheer me on my journey!”

CHRISTMAS BEDTIME STORIES

with light reflected from a small fire burning at its base. Colors from the flames danced across the frozen screen. As the man talked, pictures seemed to take shape up on the wall, images that sprang from the man's mind, fed by the firelight.

The animals were spell-bound by the colors and patterns that flowed across the screen. Motionless, they listened as the man told the story they had heard every Christmas for more than one hundred years.

"As you know, friends, my name is not really Santa Claus. It is John Franklin, and I was born in England in 1786. I first came to the Arctic region as a young midshipman, serving under Captain Matthew Flinders. We were exploring the waters of the Northern Territory, and the frozen beauty of this part of the world seeped into my bones. I determined to make polar exploration my life's work. I knew I could find a shipping route through the Arctic that would connect



"I came to the Arctic as a young sailor."

CHRISTMAS BEDTIME STORIES

East and West. I knew somewhere up here, a sailing ship from England could thread its way through the icebergs and come out on the other side of the world."

The man paused for breath. The animals watched, fascinated by pictures of a fifteen-year old boy joining the British Navy, climbing the ropes on a large sailing ship, watching ice floes pass by. The man continued his story.

"It took twenty-five years, but I succeeded. On my third expedition to the Arctic, with a crew of 130 men, I sailed around Greenland and found a path through the islands north of Canada. The path led to the Eastern Hemisphere, but I did not gain fame and fortune for this discovery. Ice crushed my ship, and my men were lost in the freezing waters. Somehow, I alone survived. I was flung unconscious onto a large drifting floe and found a day later by an Eskimo hunting party. Only a thread of life remained in my



The Eskimos brought me to their camp.

CHRISTMAS BEDTIME STORIES

frozen body. The Eskimos wrapped me in skins and paddled back to their camp. It is only because of their kindness that I am alive today."

The screen now danced with images familiar to the small creatures of the Pole: scenes of kayaks and dog sleds, Eskimo families building snow houses, hunting parties looking for seals, walruses, and polar bears. The animals watched as the wall showed how the man once known as John Franklin slowly learned the art of survival in the frozen North. They saw him bid farewell to his Eskimo friends and head out on his own. Driving a team of eight dogs, he traveled across the ice day after frozen day.

"Something was drawing me North," John Franklin said. "I had hopes of making my way back to civilization, and hitching a ride home to England and my wife. But the ice was bad, and I could not make the dogs run in any direction but north. And it felt good,



“Something inside me kept pushing me north.”

CHRISTMAS BEDTIME STORIES

somehow right, to be going north, north, always north. After endless days of travel, the urge I felt inside pushing me on, suddenly stopped. It was as clear as a voice in my head, telling me to stop now, this was the place."

With his hands, the man indicated to the animals that they were sitting at the very spot where his journey ended. They watched reflections of John Franklin building a house, caring for his team of sled dogs, hunting the large beasts of the North for food and skins, sitting alone through the long dark polar winter.

"It was during that first year that I learned to carve ice crystals. My hunting had gone well, so I had enough food and clothing to last the winter. It was my mind I was worried about: no books to read, no human to talk to. In desperation, I picked up a knife and began carving. The face of my dear wife Elizabeth took shape in my hands.



“Everything I loved, I carved in the ice.”

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Cut from the clearest iceberg crystal, the carving shimmered with inner light. In my loneliness, it seemed as if the crystal figure brought Elizabeth nearer to me, as if somehow our thoughts met across the frozen miles."

"That's how I started my crystal collection. Every day, I cut something new out of the ice, something I missed from my life back home. Faces of friends, good food, my pet collie dog, books, tools I could have put to great use in the snow, even toys I remembered from my childhood. All the things I loved became ice carvings. Soon my snow house was crowded with crystals, and I had to build a storeroom on the side."

"Finally, this night, December 21, the longest night of the winter came. I knew in a few weeks the sun would slowly return. The brief Arctic summer would be the only time I could travel south. If I waited too late to begin the journey home, I would be



"It was the only time I could travel south."

CHRISTMAS BEDTIME STORIES

trapped by the ice again. My chances of making it were slim, but the voice in my head spoke again, urging me to go now. I loaded a sled with food and skins; at the last minute I threw in a bundle of carvings. My dogs were eager to run after their long rest, and the sled flew like the wind."

"Mile after mile zipped by. Neither I nor the dogs seemed to tire. We ran all that first night and well into the next day. It was when I first pulled on the lines to stop the dogs that I realized we had actually been flying through the air. Just the wind behind us, I thought, but each day was the same. We flew high into the sky and we covered incredible distances. Already, after only three days of travel, I could see the lights of civilization below us. "

"I noticed that the atmosphere had grown uncomfortably warm. The odor of wet marsh filled me with sudden distaste. I had no desire to stop at the suffocating lands slip-



"At first I thought it was just the wind."

CHRISTMAS BEDTIME STORIES

ping by beneath us. I missed the keen crisp air of the North. But what about Elizabeth, and England? I pointed the dogs east, and in a little while, the hills of Scotland came into view. Just a few moments more, and I was over London. Everyone and everything that I loved lay below."

Here John Franklin stopped speaking, emotion choking off his words. The animals waited.

The pictures on the wall shifted now and they showed a woman, weeping. It was Elizabeth, John's wife. She prayed and wrote letters. She went to see important people, people who could send ships to look for her husband.

Three times men went north searching for John Franklin; three times they came back, defeated by the ice. At last, Elizabeth stopped crying. But always, she sat alone, reliving memories of her husband.

"Elizabeth, dear Elizabeth. I couldn't come home. As much as I wanted to be with you, I



"Elizabeth sent out ships to look for me."

CHRISTMAS BEDTIME STORIES

felt an even stronger call, a call to return north. I knew then I belonged forever at the Pole, but I wanted to reach out, dear heart, to let you feel my love once more. I did the only thing I could think to do. Grabbing the bundle of ice crystals, I flung them over the sleeping city. Somehow, I hoped, at least one crystal would find its way to you, Elizabeth."

Colors shimmered on the wall of ice behind the man. In shadowy images, the animals could see John's ice carvings drifting down on the houses of London. The few people who were awake rushed out to see the shimmering gifts that were falling from the clouds. Some folk looked up, and they caught just a glimpse of John's sled and his team of huskies as they vanished in the northern sky. The city buzzed that Christmas with talk about St. Nick. People swore they had actually seen a sleigh and eight tiny reindeer; they claimed it was Santa Claus in the flesh. At one house, John's present worked



Shimmering gifts fell from the clouds.

CHRISTMAS BEDTIME STORIES

the magic he hoped for: Elizabeth went to sleep with a tiny glass figurine clutched in her hand, her heart somehow eased by its crystalline beauty.

"That was almost a hundred and fifty years ago," John told his animal friends. "I have made the same trip every year since then. Breathing the pure Arctic air keeps me young. People all over the world know me as Santa Claus, and I scatter my ice carvings as I fly. Something happens to the crystals when they fall through the air, for by the time they land, they have become actual presents. When the journey is over, I return here to the North Pole, to watch the world on my screen and to carve from ice the gifts most needed by people below. Some gifts become playthings, to bring happiness to little children. Other gifts are much harder to carve, the gifts of food and health and peace for a suffering world."

"It is a difficult job, but I am content. I know



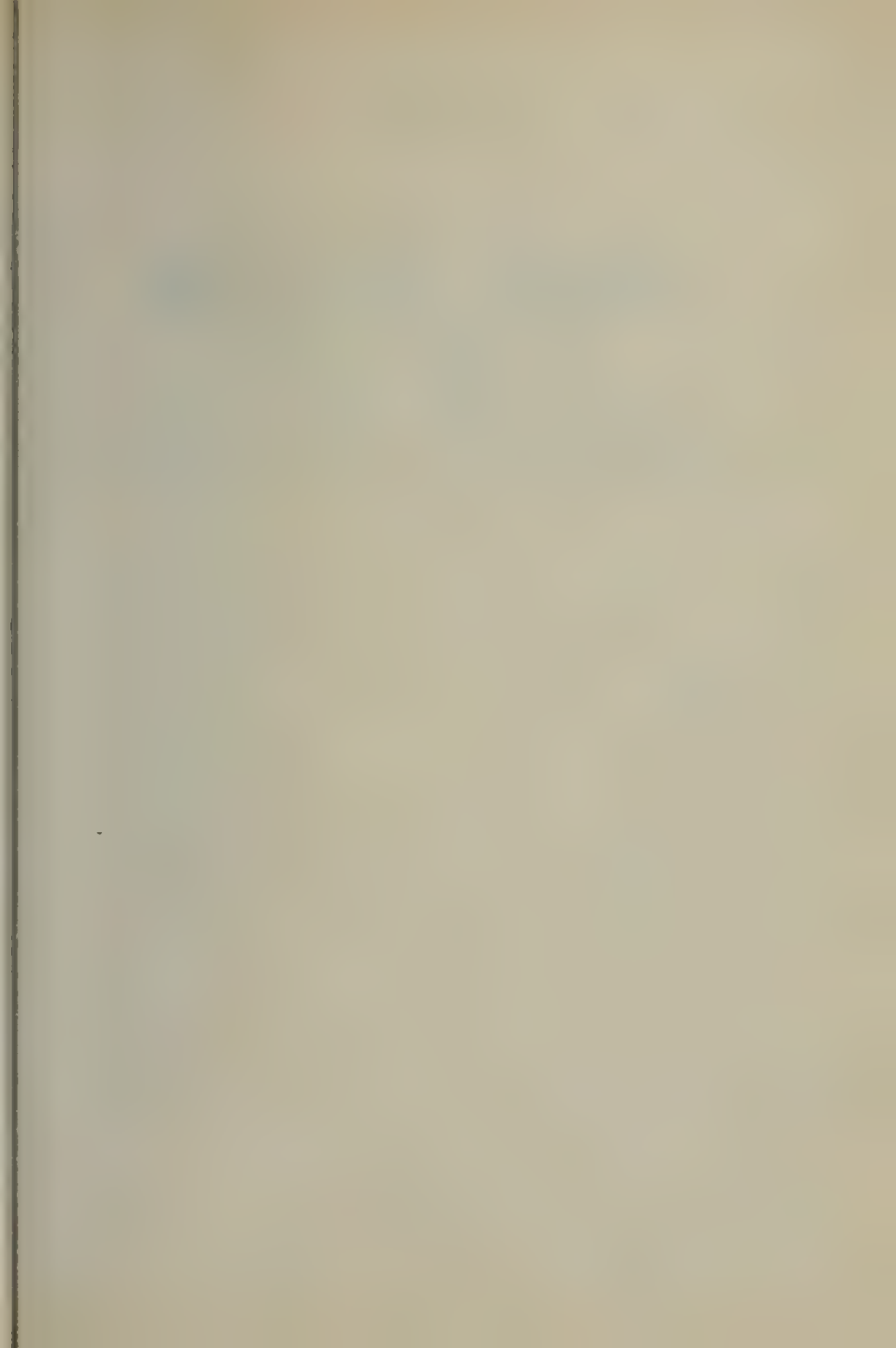
"I am neither the first nor the last Santa."

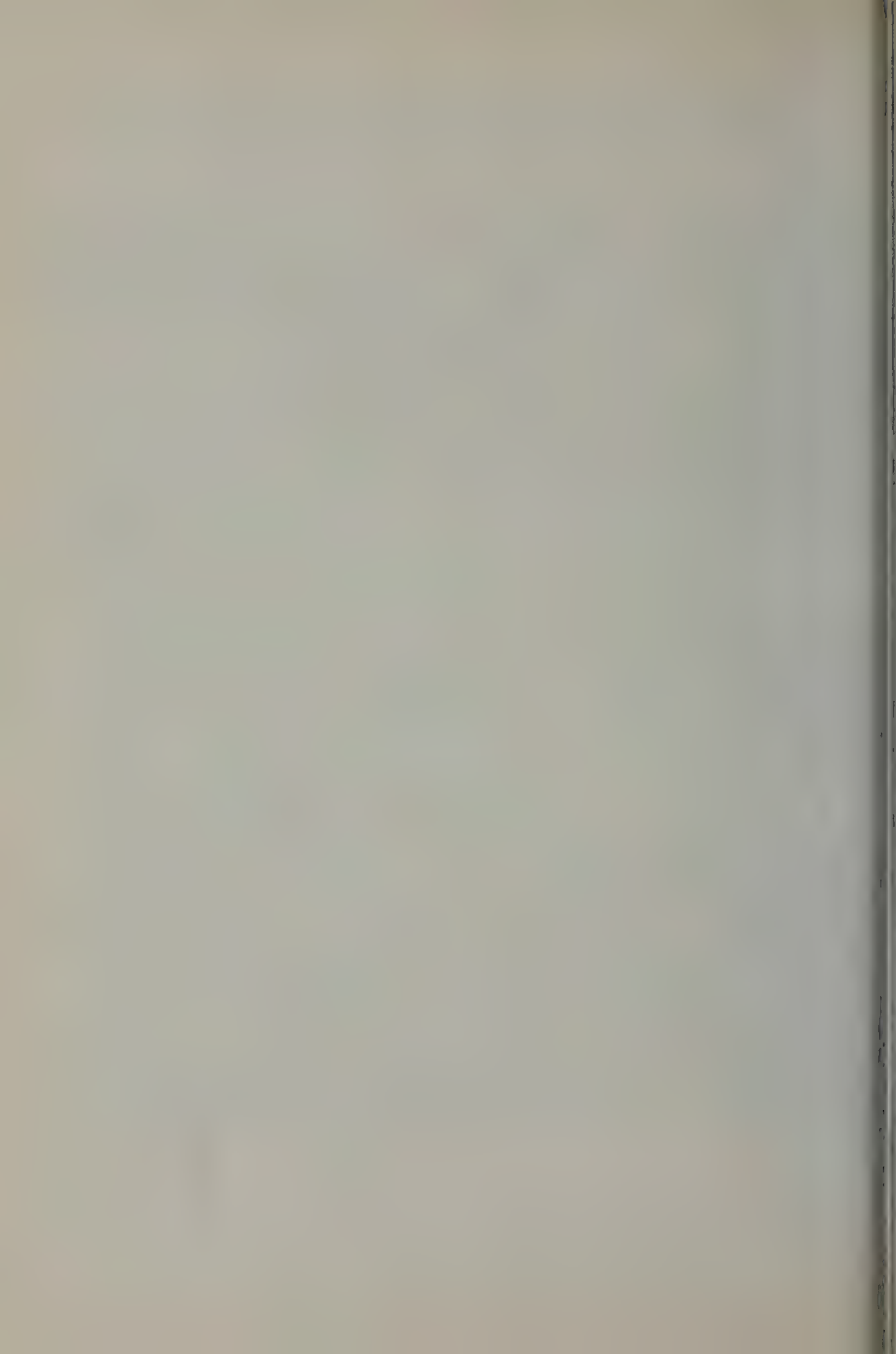
CHRISTMAS BEDTIME STORIES

it is my time to be Santa Claus. I am not the first, nor will I be the last. I am simply one link in a very long chain. Patiently studying my wall one year, I was shown the Santas of ages past. The screen revealed that at the very moment I got lost in the Arctic, the Santa before me went to his eternal reward. I know that one day, the next Santa will appear, and I will go to be at last with my Elizabeth."

"As each new exploration team approaches the Pole, I ask, 'Is it time? Are you the one?' Robert Peary, Matthew Henson, Richard Byrd, Vivian Fuchs—many travelers have come and gone; still I wait. "

The man the world knew as Santa Claus slumped in silence before the wall of ice. His task seemed overwhelming: to bring the most needed gifts to a world very much in need, year after year after year. The animals rushed to surround their friend. With nips and licks and snuffles, they soon had him standing straight again.





**STORIES FROM
THE BIBLE**
Old and New Testament

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God Makes the World

Thousands and thousands of years ago there was no earth, no blue sky, no people or animals. God saw there was only water and darkness.

Stretching out His hand, He gave an order to the Spirit that was in Him. God said, "Let light be born." Instantly light flooded all around Him. God was pleased by the light that He made from His own Inner Spirit. He decided: "I will call the light 'Day' and I will call the darkness 'Night.'"

That was God's work on the first day of the world.

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On the second and third days He moved His arm over His head in a half-circle and made the sky. Shaking His fingers He threw off clouds as part of the sky. Working quickly, he gathered the water into many places and called these places 'seas.' The earth was made next—to fit between the seas. On earth He made plants, trees and fruits start to grow.

On the fourth day the sun and moon were made. The purpose of the sun was to make the day very bright. Because God wanted the night to be dark, He made the moon a very dim light. But the moon got some help in lighting the night when God made the stars.

The fifth day all the birds and all the fish were made.

On the sixth day God made cows, lions, snakes, spiders and all the other animals and insects. Now He was almost finished in making the world. But there was still one important matter to attend to: a human being.

God picked up a little dust from the



He made plants, trees, and fruits.

BIBLE STORIES

ground. This dust was to become Adam. God needed Adam—and the people who would be born after Adam—to take charge of the earth. People would manage all the animals and plants and fruits that God had made in these six days. So He decided to make Adam in his own image.

Adam was born from the dust God had picked up. God gave him a garden to live in, at a place called 'Eden.' In Eden Adam was taught to eat and to take his food from the plants and fruits now on the earth. But one tree was never to be touched, God said. This was the "tree of knowledge."

God had worked for six days. He looked about Him and was pleased by what He had made. So on the seventh day, God rested.

Earth was ready to begin its life.



God gave Adam a garden to live in.



Wild and tame animals lived in peace.

Adam And Eve: The Fall Of Man

The garden of Eden was beautiful. When Adam looked around him, he saw plants in blossom and trees filled with fruit. He could hear the pleasant sound of running water because four rivers flowed through the garden. Wild animals and tame ones lived together in peace. There were big insects and snakes, but Adam was not afraid of them and they were not afraid of Adam.

Adam went about the garden giving everything a name, as God had told him to do. But one tree God had already named: the tree of knowledge. He told Adam to leave this tree alone, because it could cause death.

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God was not completely satisfied with this garden He had made. He had told everything on earth to grow and multiply. So now there were families of plants, birds, fish, and animals—families of everything except man. Adam needed a wife. God did not want Adam to be lonely.

God now made Eve, a woman, who would be Adam's companion. To make Eve, God put Adam into a very deep sleep. Then He took one of Adam's ribs and used it to make Eve. Adam felt no pain and when he woke up, God spoke to him about Eve.

God said, "This is your wife. You will be close to her because she is part of yourself. She is the same flesh and bone as you are." Though Adam and Eve were naked, they were not shy about it. They felt natural and comfortable because God had put them in the garden of Eden that way.

Because Eve was the same flesh and bone as Adam, she, too, was not afraid of any of



God said, "This is your wife!"

BIBLE STORIES

the wild animals or snakes. So when a snake spoke to her, she listened politely.

"Eve," said the snake, "I thought you and Adam were in charge of this garden."

"We are," answered Eve. "God said so."

"Good," said the snake, with a sly smile. "Then tell me what the fruit on the tree of good and evil tastes like."

Eve blushed with annoyance because she had to admit she did not know. "I would die from even touching that tree," she explained.

The snake smiled again and said he didn't believe that would happen. "What *will* happen if you eat the fruit," said the snake, "is that you will have the knowledge of good and evil and be as great as God."

This convinced Eve. She picked some fruit from the tree of good and evil and ate it.

Right away knowledge of good and evil came to Adam and Eve. They looked at themselves and realized they were naked. Quickly they took leaves from a nearby fig



She picked some fruit and ate it.

BIBLE STORIES

tree and made aprons to wear. Then they hid because they knew God would be angry with them.

God *was* angry, very angry. He found Adam and Eve and asked why they were hiding.

"Because we are naked so we are afraid," Adam said.

God said, "Yes, you are naked. But how did you get realize this. Did it come from the tree of knowledge?"

Adam had to confess that it had, but he blamed Eve. "I only ate the fruit because my wife—whom You gave to me was eating it and she said I should eat it, too."

"But I was tempted by the snake," Eve exclaimed.

God turned to the snake and put a curse on him. He condemned the snake to crawl on his belly in the dust when he moved on the ground. Also from then on the snake would have all women as his enemy and their children would try to smash his head. In turn,



They hid from God.

BIBLE STORIES

snakes would hate them and try to strike at their heels.

God's eyes flashed as He pointed His finger at Eve and promised her great pain in childbirth as payment for her sin in the garden. Adam also had to share the blame. God said from then on Adam would have to work hard all his life to get food. This would be much different from the garden where everything grew by itself and was ready for Adam whenever he reached out his hand.

God made clothes of skin so Adam and Eve could cover all their nakedness. For a final punishment, God cast them out of their beautiful garden. They were sent to a land east of Eden. To prevent them from sneaking back in, He put an angel on guard in the garden of Eden.

Paradise was lost.



Paradise was lost.



Cain planted crops and Abel raised animals.

The First Murder

Adam and Eve became parents. They had two boys: first, Cain, and then, Abel. When he became old enough, Cain started to plant crops. He took care of large fields and cut wheat and picked corn when each was ripe. He did the hard work of a farmer.

Abel raised animals instead of crops. He became a shepherd and took care of flocks of sheep. From his work came meat and wool. He worked as hard as Cain because he had to keep the sheep healthy and safe.

At harvest time both young men brought an offering to God. God looked with approval

BIBLE STORIES

on the new lambs that Abel gave Him. But when Cain presented his gift of his best fruits and vegetables and grains, God looked away. He did not want Cain's offerings because there was something deep in Cain that God did not approve of.

When Cain saw Abel's gift accepted by God but his own rejected, he got angry. Now God blamed Cain for his anger.

God continued with a warning: "Watch out for sin, Cain, which is like a devil waiting to grab you."

But Cain was so angry that he didn't listen to God's warning. He thought about his rejection all the time and remembered how Abel's lambs had been accepted with pleasure. His anger finally centered on his brother, Abel.

One day Cain found Abel alone in a field. Sin seized hold of him. Cain rushed at Abel and killed him!

This was the first murder on earth.



The first murder on earth.

BIBLE STORIES

Cain hid after the murder, but God found him and asked where Abel was. Cain pretended not to know. He said to God, "Am I my brother's keeper?"

Now God's anger burst out because the blood of Abel cried to Him from the ground. God cursed Cain and took away his ability to farm. He made Cain an exile forever.

Cain was overcome. He cried and pleaded with God: "My punishment is more than I can bear. Besides, people will try to kill me when they hear what has happened."

"No," said God, "they will not because I shall put a mark on you. It will remind people that terrible revenge will be taken on anyone who touches you, even though you are a killer."

Cain left the home of his birth. He became a wanderer in a country called Nod.

Adam and Eve were left with no children: Abel was dead and Cain was in exile. Eve wanted another child very much. Finally, she had another son: Seth.



"Am I my brother's keeper?"



Noah loved God and tried to follow his ways.

The Flood

By now thousands and thousands of people lived on the earth. This human race had turned out to be violent and greedy and evil. When God looked at earth, He was sorry He had made it.

God decided the people on earth were too wicked to live any longer. Everybody must be drowned!

But then God paused because He remembered one good man and his family. This man loved God and tried to follow His ways in spite of all the evil around him. The man's name was Noah. He had three married sons:

BIBLE STORIES

Shem, Ham and Japheth. God decided to give the human race another chance. He would let Noah and his family live and bring forth a good people, devoted to serving God.

God directed Noah to build a large boat, called an ark. Following God's directions exactly, Noah made the ark of cypress wood and strong reeds. He covered the outside with tar to make it waterproof. The ark was three stories high, with a door on one side.

When the ark was ready, God told Noah to store food on board, enough to last a long time. Finally God gave Noah the passenger list: Noah and his wife, his three sons and their wives, plus a male and female of every kind of living thing. The animals, even the insects, would come on board the ark in pairs.

When the passengers were on board, Noah closed the door of the ark tightly. It began to rain. It poured rain for 40 days and 40 nights. Little by little all the water raised the ark from the ground. Soon it was float-



God directed Noah to build a large boat.

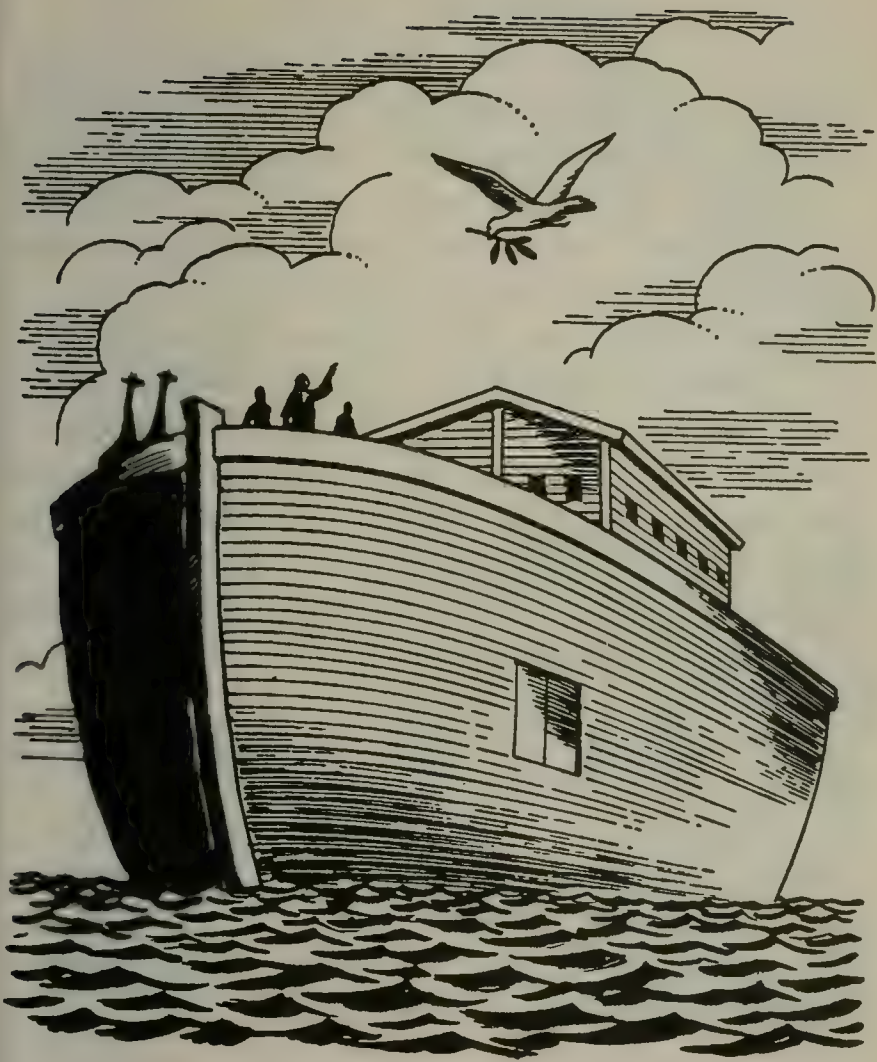
BIBLE STORIES

ing. By now all flat land was under water. Finally even the tops of mountains disappeared in the rising water. Everything and everybody on earth was dead except for the people, animals, birds and other living creatures on the ark.

The ark floated on the flood waters for 150 days. Then God decided it was time to dry the earth so the ark could land. He sent a hot wind and gradually the water level went down. Noah could see only water all around him, but he knew God had promised to bring the ark to dry land.

Luckily there were birds on board. Noah sent out a raven and then a dove to search for dry land. The second trip the dove made, it brought back an olive leaf. Noah waited another week and sent the dove out again. This time the dove didn't return so Noah knew it had found dry land and started to make its new home.

God floated Noah's ark to the mountain of



The dove brought back an olive leaf.

BIBLE STORIES

Ararat and told him and the others their journey was over. As they had gone into the ark—side by side—each pair of animals, birds, insects, came onto dry land and went forward to make a new world.

The first thing Noah did was make an altar, with offerings of thanks to God. This deed was so pleasing to God that He made a promise. He said that no matter how wicked people became in the future, He would never destroy the world by flood again. As a reminder of His promise, God made a sign that would appear in the sky among rain clouds.

This sign can still be seen today: it is a rainbow.



God made a sign in the sky.



They discovered how to make bricks.

Tower of Babel

Noah's family and all the other creatures he had saved came off the ark onto a clean-washed earth. As God wanted, Noah's sons—Shem, Ham and Japheth—started their own families. The years passed, and their families grew; so many, many people were living on the earth.

Finally there were too many people living in one place, and they started to move apart. Some went to a good, flat land called Babel. They settled there and discovered how to make bricks by baking them. With bricks they could make houses, and soon a city rose up.

BIBLE STORIES

But the people of Babel worried that they were not famous and well known to people in other lands. They decided to use their bricks to build a tower. A very tall tower would make them famous and bind them together as a people. They decided their tower would reach as high as heaven.

Work started on the tower. As it got taller and taller, God took notice of it. He also heard that the the tower was intended to reach into heaven. This was too bold!

God could easily have stopped the building through force. He could have hurt or killed the Babylonians for making Him angry. Instead God used words.

Since the flood, all men spoke the same language because they came from the same family. God saw that by talking together, people were able to decide things together and work on projects together. He also saw that building the tower would not be the end of the people's boldness. They would go on to



Work started on the tower.

BIBLE STORIES

make other selfish plans that would anger God.

God stopped the building of the tower by making people speak different languages. Suddenly they found they didn't understand one another. They couldn't make plans together. One man didn't know what another man wanted so they could no longer work together. They just babbled.

Now, at God's direction, people of one language moved together in one area. Other people who spoke a different language moved away into their own lands. The work on the tower stopped. From then on the tower stood unfinished.

Because God had made people just babble to one another, the tower was known as The Tower of Babel.



People didn't understand one another.



Finally their son, Isaac, was born.

The Sacrifice

Abraham and his wife, Sarah, loved God. They worshipped Him and obeyed Him in all ways. And yet Abraham and Sarah were sad because they had no children and now they were old.

Abraham's obedience to God pleased Him greatly. So God said to Abraham, "Sarah shall bear a child, a son." The two old people could hardly believe this wonderful news but their faith in God was strong. They dared to hope they would be parents.

Finally their son, Isaac, was born: a fine, healthy child. Abraham and Sarah were

BIBLE STORIES

overjoyed. Isaac grew tall and strong and he, too, followed Abraham in his obedience to God.

One day, God decided to test Abraham. He told Abraham that he must sacrifice his son, his only son, Isaac to him. With the saddest heart Abraham roused his servants and told them to saddle his donkey. He told Isaac to prepare for a trip, and he, himself, cut enough wood to burn a large animal. He said that God wanted him to make a burnt sacrifice on Mount Moriah. They set off on the journey, which would take about three days. Abraham carried a knife, and one of the servants carried a fiery torch.

The travellers reached Mount Moriah and climbed up some distance. When Abraham saw the altar not far away, he called a halt. To the two servants, he said, "Wait here with the donkey while my son and I go further up to the altar and worship. Tie the wood onto Isaac's back. Give me the torch." Motioning



God decided to test Abraham.

BIBLE STORIES

Isaac forward with the knife, Abraham started out again.

"Father," said Isaac, "you have forgotten a lamb for the sacrifice."

"Do not worry, my son," answered Abraham. "God will provide the sacrifice."

When they reached the altar, Abraham untied the wood and spread it on the altar. But instead of looking around for an animal to sacrifice, he motioned Isaac to lie down on the altar. Very frightened, Isaac did so. He lay perfectly still while his father tied him tightly to the wood and the altar.

Abraham picked up the large knife from the stones that supported the propped-up torch. Drawing a deep breath, he walked steadily to the altar. With the knife held in his fist, he draw back his arm. Just as he was about to plunge the knife into Isaac's heart, God sent His angel to hold back Abraham's wrist.

"Now God knows you are truly obedient



An angel held back Abraham's wrist.

BIBLE STORIES

and love Him above everyone else," said the angel. "Untie Isaac and live in happiness with a great reward to come."

Just as Abraham had finished untying Isaac and was embracing him, they heard a sound behind them. They turned to see a ram struggling to free his horns from thick, woody bushes where he was caught.

"The Lord has provided!" shouted Abraham with a joyous laugh. He and Isaac quickly caught the ram and tied it where Isaac had lain. Then very solemnly Abraham and Isaac made a burnt offering to God.

God's reward to Abraham was a promise that his descendants would be abundantly blessed and as numerous as the stars in the sky. This was indeed a great reward for a man who had great faith.



“The Lord has provided!” shouted Abraham.



"The people of Sodom are evil."

A Pillar of Salt

The Jordan Valley was one of the most beautiful spots on all the earth. "The garden of the Lord," people called it. Birds sang in the olive trees, fish leaped in the sparkling river, and vines bent low with sweet grapes. Amid all this beauty were two wicked cities, Sodom and Gomorrah. The Lord watched with great sadness as the people there lied and cheated and stole from one another every day.

God went to his faithful servant Abraham and said, "The people of Sodom and Gomorrah are very evil. I will send my angels to destroy the cities."

BIBLE STORIES

Now Abraham had a nephew, Lot, who lived in Sodom. Abraham knew Lot loved the Lord, that he lived a good life in spite of the evil that was all around him.

"Lord," Abraham asked, "will you destroy the city if you find fifty good people there?"

And the Lord answered, "No, I will not destroy Sodom if I find fifty good people."

Abraham continued. "Do not be angry with me, O Lord, but what if there are forty good people, or thirty, or only twenty? Will you destroy the city then?"

God told his servant, "No, if I find even ten good people there, I will not destroy it."

So the Lord sent his angels to Sodom. It was evening, and Lot was sitting by the city gate when he saw two strangers walking up the dusty road. Lot bowed to the men. "Welcome, strangers. Kindly be my guests tonight."

The angels answered, "No, good sir, we have sleeping mats. We will spend the night in the town square."



Lot met the two strangers by the city gates.

BIBLE STORIES

But Lot begged them. "Please come home with me. Sodom is a dangerous place for strangers. I have plenty of food and drink, enough to share."

So the men went to Lot's house. They washed and ate, and as they prepared for bed, strange noises sounded in the street outside. It was the greedy evil men of Sodom, young and old, from every part of the city.

"Come out, handsome visitors! We want to see you. Lot, where are your guests? They look so interesting! Send them out so that we can meet them!"

Lot went outside and locked the door behind him. "Men of Sodom, I know the evil things you plan to do to my guests. Please, I beg you, do not harm these visitors."

But the men would not listen. They pushed Lot aside and tried to break down the door. The angels pulled Lot inside and blinded the wicked men gathered outside the house. It was then that Lot knew his visitors



The men of Sodom besieged Lot's house.

BIBLE STORIES

were from the Lord.

"You must leave this wicked city at once." the angels said. "The Lord has sent us to destroy it. Take your family and run for your lives. Do not stop or look back. If you do, you also will be destroyed with the city."

So Lot, his wife, and his two daughters ran up the valley, and flames of fire rained down on Sodom and Gomorrah. Lot could feel the heat from the burning city behind him. "Run, my wife and my daughters, run! Do not look back. The Lord will watch over us on the mountain."

But Lot's wife cried bitter tears as she thought of her house and her belongings burning up in the fire. She had to have just one last look, so she turned her head. In an instant, she became a pillar of salt!

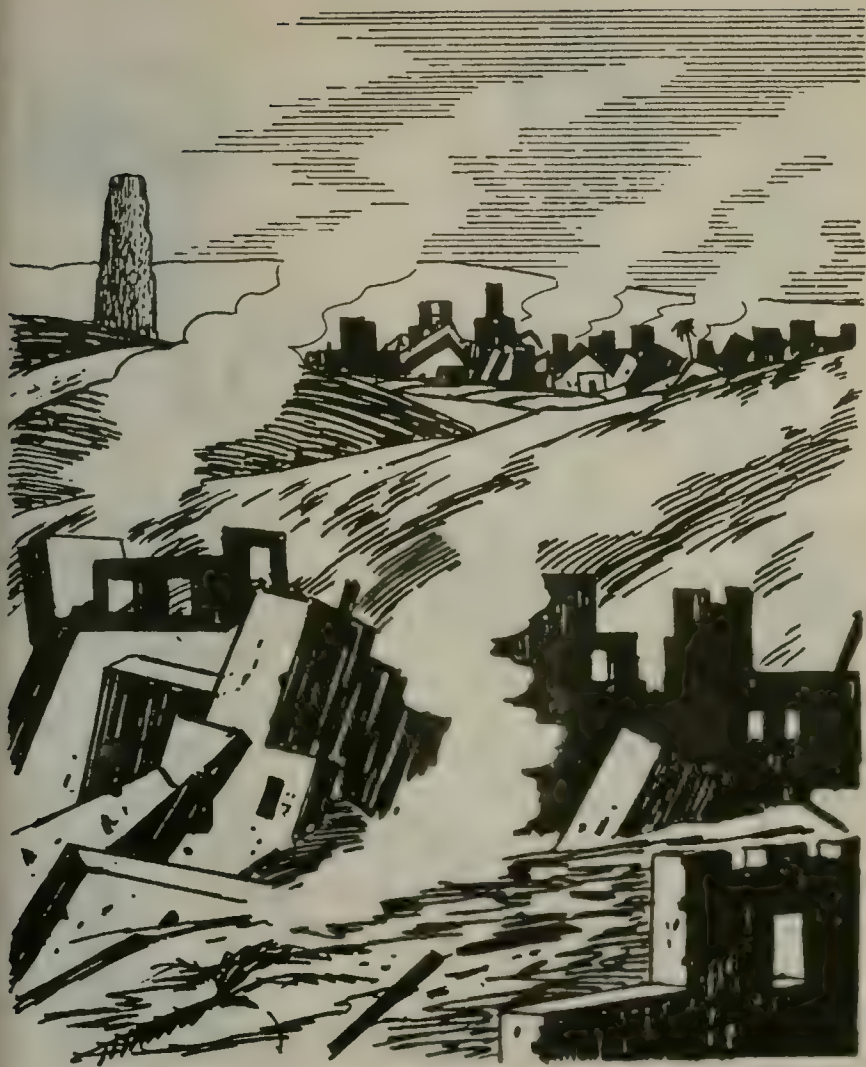
Lot and his daughters made it safely up the mountain, where they found Abraham waiting for them. Down in the valley, nothing remained of Sodom and Gomorrah but



In an instant Lot's wife became a pillar of salt.

BIBLE STORIES

ashes. And there, by the side of the road, stood a tall rock made of solid salt.



Nothing remained of Sodom and Gomorrah.



The twins were different from each other.

Brother Against Brother

Isaac married Rebecca, but they had no children for a long time. Finally twin sons were born to them. The elder one was named Esau, which means "hairy." The younger twin was named "Jacob," which means "to take someone else's place." These names described both boys exactly. Red hair covered Esau's body. When Jacob was born, he was holding onto Esau's heel as if to pull him back so he, Jacob, could take his place and be born first.

The twins continued to be different from each other as they grew up. Esau loved the

BIBLE STORIES

outdoors and became known for his hunting. Jacob liked to stay at home and was quiet and thoughtful. Their parents each had a favorite. Because Isaac loved spicy meat dishes, he favored Esau, who brought home meat from the hunt that was cooked into delicious meals. Rebecca's favorite was Jacob, who was at home all the time and who even helped her in her daily tasks.

As the first son, Esau was entitled to two things from his father: one, the birthright that belongs to the oldest son in every family, and two, Isaac's blessing. Jacob was full of envy that these two rights belonged to Esau just because he was born first. So Jacob plotted.

Jacob did not have long to wait before he saw a chance to get the better of Esau. As usual Esau had been hunting. This time, however, he stayed out too long and was exhausted by the time he dragged himself and his animal trophies home. He found Jacob cooking some soup.



"Will you give me your birthright?"

BIBLE STORIES

"My brother, I'm faint with hunger," said Esau. "Quick, give me some of your soup! It smells so good. "

Seeing his chance, Jacob asked, "What will you give me in return?"

"Anything, " said Esau. "The hunt took me so far that I haven't eaten in days."

"Will you give me your birthright?" said Jacob, dishing up a steaming bowl of soup but holding it just out of Esau's reach.

"Yes, yes," gasped the desperate Esau. "What good is my birthright if I'm dead from hunger?"

Jacob made his brother swear an oath to give Jacob his birthright. Then Jacob put the soup on the table and Esau ate hungrily .

In time Isaac, the twins' father, grew very old and was near death. His eyesight was almost gone. There was one important matter that Isaac had to attend to before he died. He had to give his blessing to his first-born son.

In a feeble voice he spoke to Esau. "My



"You must dress in Esau's clothes!"

BIBLE STORIES

first-born son, Esau, the time has come for me to bless you. Before I do that, let me have the pleasure once again of eating a dish of spicy meat, fresh from the hunt. This may be the last time you will provide such a treat for me."

Esau left immediately for the fields, intent on bringing down a fat animal for his father's meal. But, at the same time, Rebecca hurried to find Jacob, because she overheard what Isaac had said.

"Jacob, my dear son," said Rebecca to her favorite, "quickly kill two young goats from our flock so I can make a spicy meat dish for your father. Then you must dress in Esau's clothes, take the food to your father, and receive the blessing he intends to give his first-born son. Hurry!

Jacob ran to do as his mother ordered. Soon the steaming food was ready and Jacob was dressed in his borrowed clothes.

"Wait, mother," said Jacob. "Suppose my



"Come closer, my son!"

BIBLE STORIES

father hugs me as he gives me the blessing. Though his eyes cannot tell him I am Jacob, he will feel my hairless arms and know I am not Esau. He may curse me instead of bless me."

"You are right," agreed Rebecca. "So take the two goat skins and wrap yourself in them. They are just as hairy as Esau."

Old Isaac was a little surprised at how quickly his orders had been carried out, but he ate his meat with good appetite.

"Give me the blessing, now, father, that is due your firstborn son," said Jacob anxiously. He was afraid that Esau would return from the hunt and expose the plot if he didn't hurry matters along.

"You sound like Jacob," said Isaac. "Am I really talking to Esau, my first-born son?" The old man strained his almost blind eyes to see. "Come closer," he demanded.

Isaac was propped up on a couch and Jacob sat down beside him. Isaac sniffed at



Isaac formally blessed Jacob.

BIBLE STORIES

Jacob's blouse and smiled when he recognized the clean, fresh-air smell that Esau's clothes always carried. Next Isaac put his hands up as best he could and embraced Jacob. He felt the hairy goatskins on Jacob's arms and smiled again. "Yes, " he said, now satisfied, "you are my first-born, Esau."

Without wasting more time, Isaac formally blessed Jacob, making him the next head of the whole family, just as he had been blessed by his father, Abraham.

When Esau returned from the hunt, he found out about the terrible crime that had been committed against him by his twin brother. Furious, he swore to kill Jacob as soon as their father was dead. Rebecca did not want to see Jacob killed so she told her husband that Jacob should be sent to live with her brother Laban for a while.

"Jacob is looking for a wife among women we would not want to have for daughters-in-laws," Rebecca said to Isaac. "My brother



Esau swore to kill Jacob.

BIBLE STORIES

will see that he picks a suitable young woman."

Isaac agreed, of course, and the twins were separated. Jacob went 400 miles away, and lived and worked with his uncle Laban for a long time.

Many years later the twins met again and made peace with one another.



Jacob went to his Uncle Laban.



"Marry one of my brother's daughters."

A Trickster Learns his Lesson

“Listen, my son. Your brother Esau is angry that you tricked him. He wants to kill you! You must leave at once. Go to your Uncle Laban in Haran until your brother is angry no more.” Rebecca helped her favorite son, Jacob, pack some food for his long journey. Jacob was ready to leave when his father, Isaac, called to him.

“Jacob, even though you lied to me, I love you, my son. It is not good for you to marry a woman of this place. Marry one of your Uncle Laban’s daughters. Then God Almighty will bless you and give you many children.”

BIBLE STORIES

Sorrowfully, Jacob kissed his parents good-bye. He did not know if he would ever see them again. His heart was troubled as he began his dangerous journey. Would God bless someone who had tricked his brother and lied to his father?

The trip to Haran was long and full of difficulties, but after many days Jacob neared the home of his uncle. The fields were dotted with sheep, for Laban was a wealthy man. Jacob called to some shepherds nearby, "Do you know my uncle, Laban? Is he well?"

The shepherds answered, "He is well. Look, his daughter Rachel comes now to water the sheep."

Jacob saw a beautiful young woman struggling to roll the stone away from the mouth of a well. He ran to the well and pushed the stone away for her.

"I am Jacob," he told the young woman. "My mother, Rebecca, is your father's sister. I bring you greetings from my family, Cousin Rachel."



Jacob saw a beautiful woman.

BIBLE STORIES

Rachel ran home and returned with her father. When Laban saw his nephew, he kissed him and brought him home to live. For a month Jacob worked hard, caring for Laban's sheep. At last Laban said, "It is not right that you work for me without pay. What shall I pay you?"

Now Laban had two daughters, Rachel, and her older sister, Leah. Jacob had loved Rachel ever since he had first seen her watering the flocks. "Let me marry Rachel," Jacob said, "and I will work for you for seven years."

Laban agreed, and Jacob tended his sheep for seven long years. The flocks grew healthy and strong, and increased in number under Jacob's watchful eye. For the first time, the young man who had tricked his brother Esau to gain wealth, worked hard to win what he wanted—Rachel.

At last the years of waiting were over, and Laban gave a great feast, with many guests, fine food, and wine. Jacob went to the wed-



Jacob tended his sheep for seven long years.

BIBLE STORIES

ding tent and waited for his new bride, Rachel, to come to him. But in the dark of the night, Laban brought Leah to Jacob instead of Rachel. In the morning, Jacob discovered that he had been tricked. "What have you done to me?" he shouted at Laban. "Why did you trick me?"

Laban answered, "In this country, the older daughter must marry first. Stay with Leah now and then I will let you marry Rachel also. But you will have to work for me another seven years."

Jacob was furious. How could his uncle cheat him this way? At last he understood how it felt to be tricked. The Lord must be teaching me, he thought. He agreed to serve another seven years, so Laban gave a second feast for the marriage of his daughter Rachel.

During the fourteen years that Jacob stayed in Haran, the Lord blessed him with many children and large flocks. He became a rich man, and one who learned to trust the



“What have you done to me?”

BIBLE STORIES

Lord. At last, Jacob returned home. He discovered that his brother Esau had forgiven him for the terrible trick he had pulled so many years ago. The two brothers and their families lived together in peace.



Esau had forgiven Jacob.



Jacob gave Joseph a coat of many colors.

Love and Hatred in a Family

At the age of 17 Joseph found himself in an odd position. He was both the most loved person in his family and the most hated. His father, Jacob adored him. Joseph's brothers hated him just because their father loved him best.

Jacob's love for Joseph showed in his eyes, in the way they shone when he saw Joseph. Jacob's voice was always very tender when he spoke to Joseph. The final proof of Jacob's love was a special coat he had made for Joseph, a coat of many colors. Joseph's brothers did not receive coats like it.

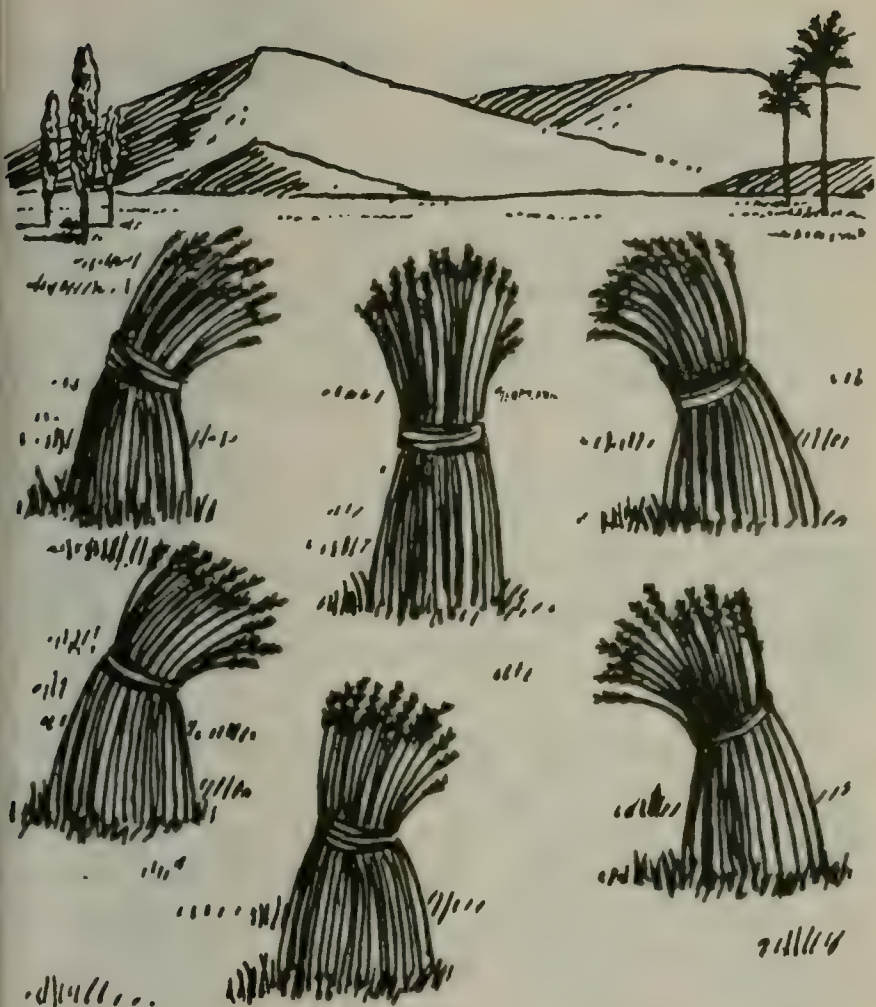
BIBLE STORIES

Joseph himself increased his brothers' jealousy. He had dreams, which he told his family. In one dream all Jacob's sons had been tying up long stalks of wheat. These bundles, called "sheaves," were lying in a field waiting to be picked up and stored in the barn.

"I dreamed last night," said Joseph to his brothers, "that my sheaf suddenly stood straight up. And then all your sheaves made a circle around mine and bowed to mine." The older boys understood this dream to mean that some day they would bow to Joseph as someone greater than themselves. This idea made them furious.

In another dream Joseph saw the sun, moon and stars bowing to him. This even irritated his loving father a little.

Jacob said, "Do you think your mother and I will be in your power? That is who you meant by the sun and moon, didn't you?" And, of course, Joseph's brothers got angry



Someday they would bow to Joseph too.

BIBLE STORIES

again that he dreamed of them as stars bowing to himself.

Now the day came that changed Joseph's life. His brothers had been gone for awhile with the family's large herds of goats, grazing them wherever the feeding was good.

Jacob said to Joseph, "Find your brothers and bring me back a report on the health of the herds."

Joseph left immediately. Finally he saw his family's herds in the distance. His brothers also saw Joseph coming toward them, and their old anger stirred again. They decided to kill Joseph, out here in fields far from home.

But one of the brothers, Reuben, did not hate Joseph enough to want to kill him. He said, "No, my brothers, we do not want his blood on our hands. We only want him out of the family. Therefore, let us put him down a deep hole and leave him there."

After a raging argument, the brothers



Their old anger stirred again.

BIBLE STORIES

voted that Reuben was right. The hole would be best. The result would be the same for them but they would not have to actually kill their brother. Reuben was glad to hear this decision because he planned to come back alone later and rescue Joseph from the hole.

When Joseph reached his brothers, all their plans were made. They had even found a hole. They tore off the colorful coat that their father had given to Joseph. They dumped Joseph into the hole. Pleased with themselves, they sat down to eat.

As Joseph's brothers ate, they enjoyed watching the travellers on the road near them. Most people on the road were traders, with lines of helpers and camels, heading for Egypt. Some of the helpers were slaves.

One of the brothers suddenly said, "We can do better with Joseph. As Reuben reminded us, we are all the same flesh. So let us not be responsible for harming him even indirectly. After all, he may starve there or a



They dumped Joseph into the hole.

BIBLE STORIES

wild animal may attack him. Instead, we will *sell* him!"

There were shouts of approval at this brilliant idea. A trader would pay a big sum for a strong slave like Joseph. And they would all be innocent of causing Joseph's death.

Reuben was sent at once to get Joseph from the hole. But Reuben ran back to them, white-faced, eyes big. "He's gone! The hole is empty!"

Bitter at having cheated themselves of a profit, the brothers did not know what had happened. Then they overheard a trader boasting to some others who had stopped to eat.

"Today I am a very lucky man," said this trader. "I found a healthy young boy in a hole not far from here. I went to a lot of trouble pulling him out. But it was worth it. I stopped a wealthy merchant with many camels and slaves, who was on his way to trade in Egypt. He gave me 20 pieces of silver for this boy. Think of it, 20 pieces of sil-



"I found a healthy young boy."

BIBLE STORIES

ver for something I just happened to find!"

It was time for Joseph's brothers to return home with their goats—and without either Joseph or 20 pieces of silver. They worried about explaining Joseph's absence to their father. Then one of them remembered Joseph's coat of many colors and told the others his idea.

Again Reuben was sent on an errand. This time he was successful, for he found Joseph's coat that they had torn off him. When Reuben returned with the coat, the other brothers killed a young goat. They tore the coat more and dipped it in the blood of the dead goat.

When the brothers reached home, they gave Joseph's bloody, torn coat to Jacob.

"This is my Joseph's coat," gasped Jacob. "What has happened to him?" With solemn faces his sons told him Joseph had been killed by a wild animal. Jacob cried and cried for Joseph, and no one could comfort him.

Jacob said, "I will mourn my son Joseph all my life."



"I will mourn for Joseph all my life."



Joseph spent wisely and managed well.

From Rags to Riches

When the trader who bought Joseph reached Egypt, he put him up for sale in the marketplace. Immediately Joseph was bought by Potiphar, an officer of Pharaoh. Potiphar was rich, with a big household.

Gradually Joseph made himself more and more useful in Potiphar's mansion. Soon Potiphar saw that Joseph was capable of running the mansion and put him in charge of all the servants and all the household money.

Joseph spent wisely and managed very well. Soon the only decision Potiphar had to make at home was what he felt like eating

BIBLE STORIES

that day. The days in the mansion also became more interesting for Potiphar's wife because she was attracted to young Joseph.

Joseph avoided his employer's wife as much as possible. More than once he had to say, "No, I will not betray my master." But the woman was determined to have Joseph make love to her.

Finally, one fateful day, Potiphar's wife cornered Joseph. She grabbed at him. He pushed her roughly away. But she held on to his loincloth and it came off. Joseph ran.

When Potiphar returned home, his wife met him and held out Joseph's loincloth. "Do you recognize this garment?" she yelled. "It belongs to this Hebrew you keep praising. Oh, yes he runs your household well, but now he tries to run your wife too!"

Horried, Potiphar ordered Joseph into prison. But there Joseph impressed the head of the prison with his ability to organize everything and everybody around him just as



Potiphar's wife cornered Joseph.

BIBLE STORIES

he had impressed Potiphar. Soon Joseph was in charge of the other prisoners, and they depended on him, too. He even interpreted their dreams when they had a troubled sleep.

Meanwhile there was trouble at the palace of Pharaoh. Pharaoh had dreams that bothered him, and no one could tell him what they meant. One dream had seven fat cows eaten by seven thin ones. Someone told Pharaoh about Joseph's ability to interpret dreams and he was sent for right away.

When Joseph heard Pharaoh's dream, he said, "Egypt is about to have seven years of good harvests followed by seven years of famine."

By this time in his life, Joseph was in the habit of advising everyone. So he continued, "It is clear what to do: store grain from the good years so Egypt will not starve in the years with no harvest."

Convinced—and impressed by Joseph—Pharaoh selected him to follow the advice he



Joseph interpreted Pharaoh's dream.

BIBLE STORIES

had just given. Everyone in the palace agreed with Pharaoh's decision, even though Joseph was only thirty years old and had just come from prison. Pharaoh was so convinced of Joseph's worth that he gave him clothes fit for a prince, a special ring, a gold chain, and a lovely, well-born wife, Asenath.

Joseph put his powers of organization to work. He went all over Egypt, selecting capable men to be in charge in each area. Large storehouses were built and the grain from the good years started to fill them. Pharaoh had ordered that one-fifth of all the grain grown in Egypt for seven years be put in the care of Joseph's men, and so it was.

With the eighth year, the grain stopped coming into the storehouses. There was either no grain from a field or some tiny, mostly diseased kernels. Farmers had nothing to market. Soon they had eaten even their own storage. Egyptians everywhere were beginning to starve. Now Joseph opened the



Pharaoh gave Joseph clothes fit for a prince.

BIBLE STORIES

immense storehouses and distributed their grain carefully to the hungry people.

People in other countries were also starving. In Joseph's home of Canaan, his father and brothers, along with their wives and children, were starving. But Jacob had heard the Egyptians had grain. Keeping his new favorite, Benjamin, at home, he sent his other sons to Egypt to buy grain from Pharaoh's assistant, whom everyone had heard about.

Admitted to Joseph's presence, his brothers did not recognize him. But Joseph knew them! He then began to play a little game with his brothers. He treated them roughly and questioned them about their home in Canaan. He pretended to doubt everything they said. Finally, he said, "Let this youngest brother Benjamin come here to Egypt as a sign of good faith."

The brothers were upset because their father kept Benjamin close beside him always. Jacob remembered he had lost



His brothers did not recognize him.

BIBLE STORIES

Joseph by letting him go with his older sons. But Joseph settled the matter by selling them grain and ordering Simeon, one of his older brothers, held as a hostage until his other brothers returned with Benjamin. He also had the money paid him by each brother put back in their grain sacks, without their knowledge.

Jacob was very upset when he heard what had happened to Simeon in Egypt. And he was confused—along with his sons—as to how their money could have got back into their sacks. He refused to let Benjamin go. Instead Jacob parceled out the Egyptian grain carefully to the many members of his family so it would last as long as possible.

But after some time, all the grain was eaten. Jacob then faced his problem: part from Benjamin or see his children and their families starve, including himself and Benjamin. He did the only thing he could do: he sent Benjamin with his other sons to Egypt



Simeon was held as hostage.

BIBLE STORIES

to buy more grain and redeem the hostage Simeon. He sent gifts and money for the new grain as well as the returned money from the first trip. Jacob said, "Getting the money back was an error some steward happened to make. It must go back."

Again on this visit Joseph played with his brothers. To their amazement he not only sold them grain but also gave a fine dinner for them. As they journeyed toward Canaan, however, the steward of Joseph's house followed and stopped them. He said, "My lord is missing his silver goblet. It is the one he drinks from and uses in making prophecies. Which of you has stolen it?"

All the men denied the theft, but the steward searched each pack and found the goblet in Benjamin's pack. All returned to Egypt. All were desperately frightened. Joseph received them sternly, but said they all might leave except the one who had stolen his goblet. "That one," ordered Joseph, "will



The goblet was found in Benjamin's pack.

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become my slave here in Egypt."

But Joseph could not keep his pretense going. He suddenly sent everyone from the room except his brothers. Then he stood and spread his arms wide and said, "I am your brother Joseph. How is my father?"

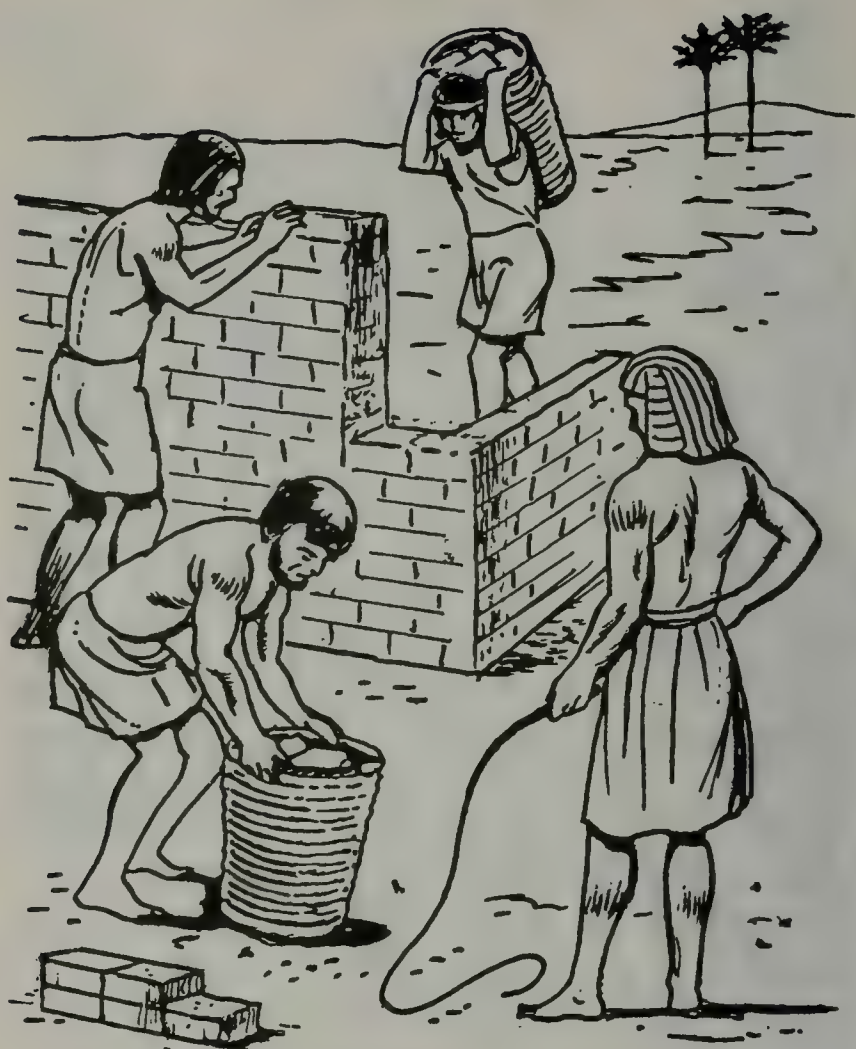
It took some time before the men from Canaan could believe this miracle. But they knew it was Joseph when they saw the love with which he embraced Benjamin.

Now Joseph the Organizer took over. He sent his brothers home again, with wagons and orders to bring the entire family to Egypt. Almost seventy people moved from Canaan and were settled in an area near to Joseph. It was almost too much for Jacob for by now he was 130 years old.

But when Jacob saw his most beloved son, Joseph, returned to him, life flowed through his old veins. Jacob lived for 17 more years, a happy man. Joseph himself lived to be 110 and was much honored in his family.



"I am your brother Joseph."



The slave masters whipped the people cruelly.

Baby in a Basket

In the land of Egypt, the twelve sons of Jacob prospered, and they had many, many sons and daughters. Years passed, and each family became a great tribe. A new Pharaoh ruled Egypt. He feared these people, who worshipped the God of Abraham and Isaac. "Let us make the Hebrews work as slaves," he said, "so they will never take our land from us." The Egyptians forced the Hebrews to build their cities. The slave masters whipped the people cruelly, and worked many of them to death. But the harder the Hebrews worked, the stronger they became.

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God blessed them with many children. The tribes grew and grew.

So Pharaoh passed another law. He ordered that all Hebrew baby boys be thrown into the Nile River. Some babies drowned and some were eaten by crocodiles. But one Hebrew mother thought of a way to save her precious son. She wove a basket of reeds and covered it with tar so water could not get inside. Carefully, she tucked her baby into the basket and floated it out into the river. "Lord," she prayed, "Pharaoh's daughter comes often to this spot to bathe. Guide the princess to my son, that he might live!"

"What a fine baby boy!" Pharaoh's daughter exclaimed, when her servants brought the basket up from the water. "I do not have the heart to drown this beautiful Hebrew child!" Instead, she took the baby to the palace and raised him as her own son.

The boy, named Moses, grew into a strong young man. One day he saw an Egyptian



“What a fine boy!”

BIBLE STORIES

master beating an elderly Hebrew slave. Outraged that someone would whip such a feeble old man, Moses struck the slave master and killed him. Moses knew Pharaoh would punish him, so he ran away and hid in the wilderness. There, he worked many years as a shepherd, but God had other plans.

"What is this?" Moses cried, as a bush at the side of the trail burst into flames.

"Moses," spoke a voice from the bush. "Go back to Egypt. Tell Pharaoh to let my people go." Moses knew it was the voice of the Lord. He knelt down, trembling with fear and excitement. God told Moses He had heard the cries of the Hebrew people and that, at last, He would bring them out of slavery.



Moses struck the slavemaster.



Moses stood before Pharaoh.

To the Promised Land

Even though Moses had grown up in the palace of Pharaoh, he trembled as he stood before the ruler of Egypt, with only a shepherd's staff in his hand.

"Mighty Pharaoh, the God of Heaven and Earth says, 'Let my people go.'"

Pharaoh just laughed. "I do not fear your God. The Hebrew people are hard-working slaves. I will never let them go!"

Then the Lord spoke to Moses, and told him to strike the waters of the river with his shepherd's staff. Instantly, all the water in Egypt turned to blood.

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Pharaoh still laughed, "My magicians can perform that same trick. Get out of my sight, Moses!"

Following God's instructions, Moses went back before Pharaoh nine more times. Each time, he said to the Egyptian king, "The God of Israel says, 'Let my people go.'" Each time, Pharaoh laughed, so God sent terrible plagues upon the land. Frogs swarmed over fields and houses, gnats and flies stung people. All the cattle died, and locusts ate up the crops. Darkness covered the land, and the Egyptians suffered from sores all over their bodies. But Pharaoh would not let the Hebrew people go.

At last, God told Moses "This night, Pharaoh's heart will soften. This night, I will pass over Egypt. In each house, the eldest son will die, unless the door is marked with the blood of a lamb."

When the Egyptians woke and found their firstborn children dead, a terrible cry filled the land. The Hebrews fled, and no one



God sent terrible plagues upon the land.

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stopped them. Freedom at last! Moses and the people sang for joy as they marched down to the shores of the Red Sea. But soon, Pharaoh changed his mind. He and his soldiers chased after the Hebrews.

Once again, God told Moses to use his shepherd's staff. As Moses lifted the stick, the waters of the sea flowed back, and a dry path opened. The people rushed across to the other side. Then God caused the waters to flow back, drowning all the Egyptians.

God showed his faithfulness and his mercy as he led the people. He fed them bread from heaven in the desert, and he showed them which way to go, even at night. God took Moses up to a mountaintop and gave him the laws by which his people were to live. In everything, God took care of the children of Israel, but they worried and complained. They wandered in the wilderness for forty years because they did not trust in Him. Finally, they reached the Promised Land.



A dry path opened.



Joshua sent two spies to Jericho.

The Fall of Jericho

After leading the Hebrew people out of Egypt, and guiding them in the wilderness for forty long years, Moses died. The Lord said to Joshua, "As I was with Moses, so I will be with you. You must lead these people so they can take the land I promised their fathers."

Joshua told all the leaders of the people to prepare to cross the Jordan River. "Get your supplies ready. In three days the Lord will help us capture this land." Then Joshua sent out two spies to look closely at the city of Jericho.

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Inside the city, the men met a woman named Rahab. She hid them in her house when the king's guards came by. She gave them information about Jericho. In return, the Hebrew spies promised to protect her family when Joshua and his soldiers captured the city. Rahab tied a rope out of her window so the men could escape without being seen. They crossed back over the river to report to Joshua.

"Joshua, the people on the other side are very afraid of us." The spies said. They told him about Rahab. "Rahab says everyone in Jericho knows that the Lord is with us. She says the men in Jericho are afraid to fight us. Surely, the Lord has given us this land!"

It was a great day for the Hebrew people. After forty years of wandering in the wilderness, the Lord led them at last to the banks of the Jordan River. Over on the other side, the Promised Land, the land of milk and honey! With Joshua in the lead, the people



They had reached the promised land.

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crossed over the river into the land that God so long ago had promised would be theirs. They stopped to worship and sing praises to the Lord. As Joshua finished his prayers, he looked up to see a man with a sword standing in front of him. "Are you a friend or an enemy?" Joshua asked.

"Neither," the man replied. "I have come to command the Lord's army. Take off your sandals. The place where you are standing is holy."

Joshua realized this man was an angel sent from God. "Does the Lord have a command for me, his servant?" he asked.

The angel told him that the Hebrew people were to capture and destroy the great walled city of Jericho. "Joshua, gather all your fighting men. At the front, place priests carrying trumpets. March around Jericho one time every day. Do this for six days. On the seventh day, march around the city seven times. On that day, the priests will blow the



“Are you a friend or an enemy?”

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trumpets, the men will shout, and the walls of Jericho will fall!"

Early the next morning, the Hebrew soldiers lined up behind the priests. Silently, they marched outside the city. Tramp, tramp, tramp. Inside the walls, the people of Jericho were puzzled. Why did these strange soldiers march without making a sound? Tramp, tramp, tramp. The people grew more nervous. Were these men going to attack? The king of Jericho ordered the gates closed and placed more guards around the city. Tramp, tramp, tramp. Six days of silent marching passed, and each day the people of Jericho became more worried.

The seventh day dawned. The Hebrew soldiers were ready to march at the first gleam of sunlight. Around Jericho six times they marched. Tramp, tramp, tramp! The seventh time around, Joshua cried, "Shout, men, shout! For the Lord has given us this city!"

The men stood and shouted with all their



The soldiers lined up behind the priests.

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might. The priests blew their trumpets until they had no breath left, and the thick stone walls of the city of Jericho crumbled like a clay pot. Inside, people screamed and ran, leaving everything behind them. Rahab, the woman who had helped the spies was right. Most of the men of Jericho did not stay to fight. The Hebrews followed, and easily defeated the few who remained.

The Lord ordered Joshua and his men to burn everything in the city of Jericho. Only things made of silver, gold, bronze, or iron were saved as gifts to God. Of all the people in Jericho, only Rahab and her family were allowed to live, because of the help she gave Joshua's spies.



The walls came tumbling down.



With his bare hands Samson killed the lion.

Strength from the Lord

A strong young man rested his head in the lap of a beautiful woman.

"Oh, Samson," murmured Delilah as she stroked his long hair. "You have the strength of ten men in your arms. Prove that you love me, and reveal the secret of your strength."

At this time, a foreign people, the Philistines, ruled the land of Israel. They were cruel, and did not honor God. But God blessed Israel with a hero, a man strong in the power of the Lord. Once, a lion attacked Samson. With his bare hands, Samson tore the lion apart. Later, Samson tied torches to

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three hundred foxes' tails and drove them through the Philistines' fields. The crops burned to the ground. In battle, Samson killed a thousand Philistine soldiers using just a bone he found in the hills.

So the Philistines wanted to capture Samson. They promised Delilah much silver if she could discover the secret of Samson's strength. Night after night, she kissed and begged. Samson told her lies about his strength so she would quit asking. Finally, he could stand it no longer. "Woman, I grow weary of your questions. My strength comes from the Lord. My long hair is a sign that I am faithful to Him. If anyone cuts my hair, I will become weak."

Samson fell asleep in Delilah's lap and she called in a man to shave off Samson's hair. When he woke, he did not know his strength had left him, and he tried to fight the Philistines. They gouged out his eyes and tied him up. In prison, his hair began to grow back.



“If anyone cuts my hair, I become weak!”

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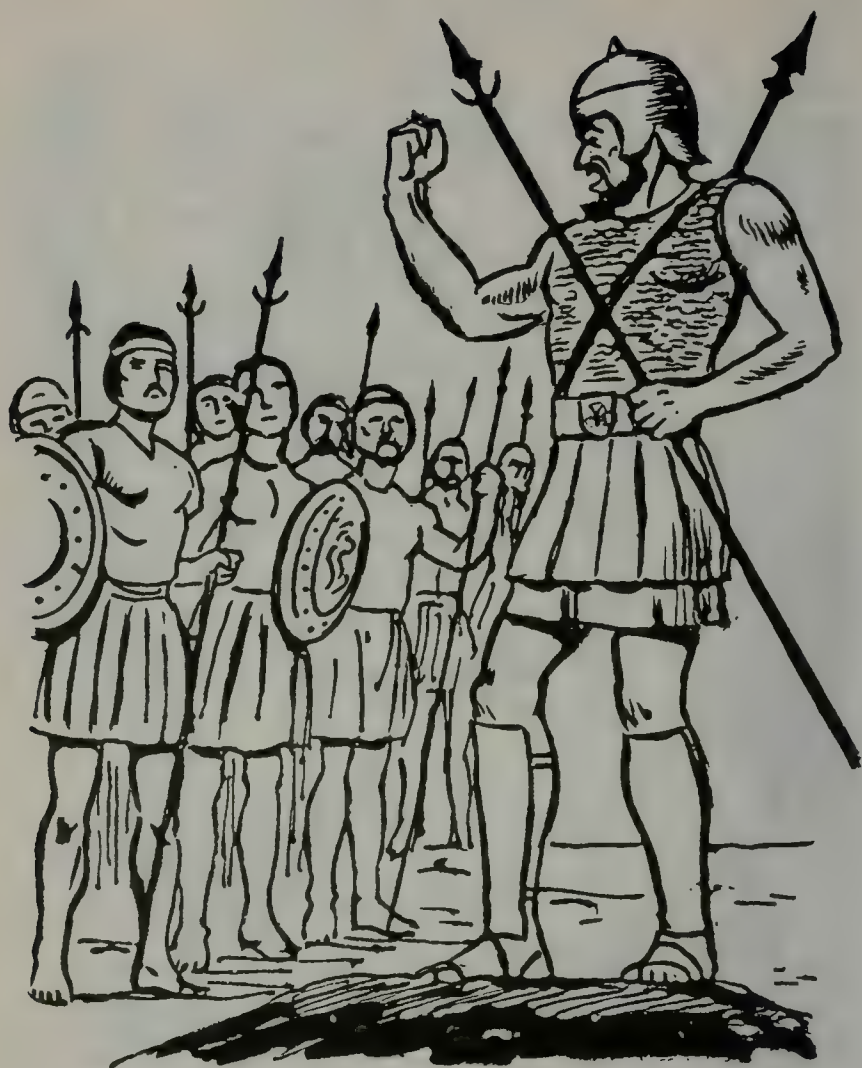
The Philistines gathered to celebrate. "Bring Samson out to amuse us," the king cried. They led Samson to the temple of their foreign god.

Samson prayed, "Lord, give me strength once more, so the Philistines can see the power of the one true God."

Samson pushed with all his might on the posts of the temple, and it fell, crushing the king and all the people inside. With his death, Samson killed more Philistines than when he was alive.



Samson pulled down the posts of the temple.



"I challenge your God."

The Boy and the Giant

Sunlight poured down on the beautiful hills of Elah. But when the men of Israel looked up, they saw a terrifying sight. There on the hilltop, a Philistine soldier stood shouting insults at them.

“You call yourselves the army of the living God. Then why do you hide in the valley? Today I challenge your God. Send out one soldier to fight against me. When I win, you will see that your God has no power. We will make you our slaves!”

The men who listened to these insults had fought many brave battles. But they feared

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this Philistine, for he was no ordinary soldier. Goliath stood nearly ten feet tall, and he wore a bronze helmet and a coat of mail. He had one spear tied to his back and held another one in his hand. Hundreds of men had died in battle, fighting against Goliath. Among all the soldiers of Israel, there was no man willing to fight this beast alone.

Only one person was brave enough to face Goliath—David, a young shepherd boy. He had come to the army camp to bring food for his older brothers who were soldiers.

David was amazed that everyone feared the giant Philistine. "Does Goliath think he can speak against the Lord? Let me fight this Philistine! When a bear attacked my father's sheep, I killed it. God saved me from the bear, and he will save me from Goliath."

Saul, the king of Israel, gave David a helmet, armor, and a sword. But David refused them. "I have never used a sword. I will take my slingshot and some stones from the



David was brave enough to face Goliath.

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brook, and God will be with me."

Goliath roared with laughter when David stepped up to fight him. "What, do you send me a child? Come here, boy, and I'll feed you to the birds!"

The Philistine charged with his heavy sword, but the shepherd boy had his sling ready. Wh-r-r-r! A single stone flew through the air and struck Goliath on his forehead. The giant fell down dead!

The enemy soldiers watched in horror as David took Goliath's own sword and cut off their champion's head. The men of Israel charged up the hill and killed many Philistines that day. David became the leader of the army, and later was crowned king of Israel.



The giant fell down dead.



Solomon solved many problems.

The Wisest Man

It was midnight; young King Solomon tossed and turned on his bed. He had so many difficult decisions to make! All the people of Israel brought their problems to him. At last, Solomon fell asleep, and in a dream, God spoke to him.

“Solomon, I see you are troubled. Ask for anything, and I will give it to you.”

Solomon's mind filled with visions of gold and jewels and great palaces and kings bowing before him. Should he ask for wealth or power or long life? Then the young king remembered the problems of his people.

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"O Lord, you have placed me on the throne of Israel, but I am like a little child. I am not wise enough to rule your people. I ask, Lord, for wisdom, so that I might rule justly."

Solomon's answer pleased God. "Because you desire wisdom to rule my people, Solomon, you shall have it. Of all men to live on this earth, you shall be known as the wisest. And I will also bless you with wealth and power and a long life, as long as you walk in my ways."

In the morning the young king woke, strong in the power and wisdom of the Lord.

A servant knocked at his door. "O king, two women wish to see you. They have a baby boy with them, and each woman says the child is hers."

Solomon took his seat in the court. A woman threw herself at his feet. "King Solomon, this child is mine. That mother's baby died, and in the night, she stole my son. Now she says he belongs to her!"



"Each woman says the child is hers."

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"Do not listen to her, O King!" the second woman cried. "This is my son. She is lying!" The sound of their arguments filled the courtroom.

Solomon looked at each woman. He looked at the tiny boy sleeping peacefully. At last the king turned to the guard standing by the throne. "Soldier, draw your sword. Cut the baby in half, and give a piece to each woman. That will stop this noisy quarreling."

The first woman just stared at the king, but the second woman screamed, "No, no! I beg you, King Solomon, do not hurt the child! I will give him to her if you will only let him live!"

Then King Solomon said to his guard, "Give the baby to the second woman. A true mother will suffer first before she lets her child suffer."

Word of Solomon's wisdom spread far and wide. People came to ask his advice, and scribes wrote down his wise teachings. The



"Cut the baby in half."

BIBLE STORIES

land of Israel became a great nation, and all who saw it said, "How great is the Lord, the God of Israel!"



Scribes wrote down his wise teachings.



"Find me a beautiful new Queen."

The Queen Who Saved Her People

Sparks of anger flashed from King Xerxes' eyes. "Because Queen Vashti has disobeyed me, she may never live at the palace again. Find me a beautiful new queen, one who will obey me."

Xerxes of Persia was a powerful ruler. He conquered Israel and brought many of the people to live in Persia. Mordecai was a Jew who worked in Xerxes' palace. When he heard that the king wanted a new queen, he thought of his young cousin, Esther. What a wonderful chance this would be for her!

Esther was very beautiful, so she was

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chosen to live at the palace with several other girls. There, the young women were bathed with precious oils and dressed in fine gowns. Xerxes would pick one of them to be his new queen.

Mordecai told Esther goodbye. "May the Lord our God be with you, cousin, and tell no one of me or your family. There are those in the palace who do not love the Hebrew people."

The day came for Xerxes to choose his new queen. Esther's beautiful face and her soft pleasant manner pleased him. He placed the royal crown on her head and gave a great banquet in her honor.

Now the king's chief advisor, Haman, did not like Mordecai because he would not worship the king and the advisors as gods. Haman convinced King Xerxes to pass a law ordering the death of any person who would not bow before the throne. Haman knew that the Jews bowed only to their God.

When news of this law reached the people,



Xerxes chose Esther for his new queen.

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a great cry rose in the land. Mordecai sent word to Queen Esther. "Ask the king to stop this evil plan, or all your people shall die."

Esther trembled with fear when she received the message. To go to the king when he had not called for her was against the law. To disobey meant death.

But she had to do something! For three days, Esther prayed. She took nothing to eat or drink.

At last, she put on her finest robes. She went to the king's inner courtyard and stood there silently. The minutes and the hours passed. Would Xerxes kill her when he saw her there? At last the king looked up. The sad look in his wife's beautiful eyes softened his heart.

"What is it, Esther? What do you wish of me?"

"Oh, King Xerxes, if I have pleased you, spare my life!" Esther cried.

The king looked puzzled. Esther revealed



"If I have pleased you spare my life."

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her secret, that she was a Jew. She explained that she and Mordecai and all the Jews in Persia would die because of Haman's evil plan. Xerxes grew angry when he learned that Haman had tried to trick him. He changed the evil law and ordered Haman put to death. Esther's bravery had saved her people.



He ordered Haman put to death.



"O Lord, my God, save me!"

Daniel in the Lions' Den

Daniel sat on the edge of a jagged rock. It was so dark inside the cave, he could not see much around him. But the noises he heard were horrible—growls and roars and rumblings. Daniel knew those were the sounds of hungry lions. He prayed, "O Lord my God, save me! Shut the lions' mouths so they will not harm me!"

Outside the cave, King Darius of Babylon called to his friend, "Daniel, may the God you serve protect you!"

Daniel's enemies smiled. They were sure their plan would work. In the morning there

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would be nothing left in the lions' den but a few bones.

Of all the king's most trusted men, Daniel was the wisest. He served the king faithfully and never cheated him like the other advisors did. The wicked leaders knew if they could get rid of Daniel, they could cheat even more and grow richer.

So they went to the king, "Live forever, Darius! We know that all good gifts come from you. Therefore, no one should be allowed to ask for things from any god or from any man but you, O King."

Darius was pleased, "Yes, truly I am greater than other men or golden gods. Who can give greater gifts than I, King of all Babylon? If a person disobeys this law, he must die."

Daniel heard about the new law, but he still prayed to God three times each day, just as he had always done. The wicked advisors knew he would do this, and went back to Darius.



"I am greater than other men or golden gods."

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"We have caught Daniel asking for things from his God. Now he must be thrown to the lions. Will you obey your own law?"

"But Daniel prays to his living God. He asks for nothing from any man but me. He is my most faithful advisor." Darius was greatly saddened, but he had no choice. All night, he paced back and forth, worrying about Daniel in the lions' cave.

At sunrise, the king ordered his men to roll the stone away from the cave. He peered into the darkness, afraid of what he would see.

But Daniel called out to him. "Do not fear, King Darius! My God sent his angel and shut the lions' mouths! See, the beasts sleep around me."

Darius ordered that the wicked advisors be thrown into the cave. The lions awoke and tore their bodies to pieces. The king wrote a letter to all his people, "Daniel's God is the living God. He does great things in heaven and earth. God saved Daniel from the lions."



"See the beasts sleeping around me."



“Let us leave as soon as we can!”

The Man Who Ran From God

Jonah handed the captain of the ship his money. "Take me to the city of Tarshish," he said. "Let us leave as soon as we can."

Jonah did not tell the captain why he was in a hurry. It was because of the Lord. Jonah had promised he would do whatever God asked, so the Lord had told Jonah to preach in the evil city of Nineveh. But Jonah was afraid and decided not to keep his promise. Now he wanted to go to Tarshish, as far from Nineveh as he could go.

The captain was glad to have a passenger on board. He set sail for Tarshish right away.

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But a great wind whipped up the sea and the ship rolled in the huge waves. The sailors were afraid. They looked around for Jonah. He was asleep!

"How can you sleep in this storm?" the sailors shouted. "Get up! Pray to your God so that he will save us."

So Jonah prayed. But still the wind howled and the waves crashed over the side of the ship. Then the sailors said to one another, "Let us throw lots to see who among us is the cause of this terrible storm."

Each man threw the sticks, and each time the answer was No. Finally, Jonah tossed the sticks. This time the answer was Yes. Jonah was the reason the wind was raging so.

"What have you done? Why is your God displeased with you?" the men asked.

"I am a Hebrew," Jonah answered. "I worship the God of Heaven and Earth. Throw me into the sea. I know it is my fault that this storm has come." As Jonah spoke, the waves grew bigger.



“Who caused this terrible storm?”

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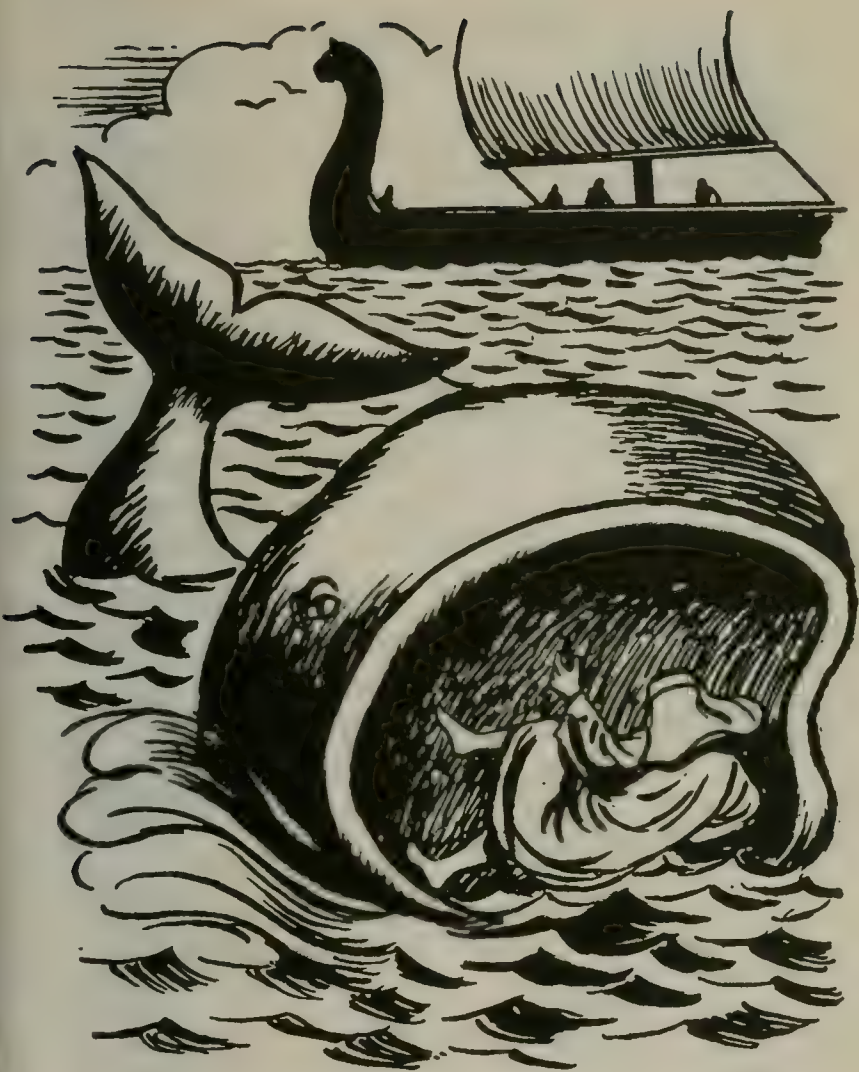
But the men did not want to harm Jonah. They cried out to the Lord, "God of Jonah, we see that you rule the land and the ocean. It must be that you want this man back." Then they picked up Jonah and threw him over the side of the ship.

At that moment, the wind stopped and the waves calmed down. The sailors saw God's power at work on the sea, and they began to worship him.

Now swimming beside the ship was a great whale. The Lord caused the whale to swallow Jonah, and there he stayed for three days and three nights.

It was dark, and it smelled bad inside the belly of the huge fish. Jonah feared he would die at any time. He prayed to God, "Lord, hear my voice and save me from death. When I make promises to you, I will keep them, O God."

At last, God spoke to the great fish. The whale spit Jonah out onto the shore.



The Lord caused the whale to swallow Jonah.

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As Jonah lay weeping on the sand, the Lord once again called him to go to Nineveh. "Get up! Tell the people to stop their wrongdoing or I will destroy them."

This time, Jonah did what God wanted. The people of Nineveh heard Jonah preach and they turned toward the Lord. The king ordered a day of going without food and praying, so that God might change his mind about destroying the city. When God saw that the people had put their evil ways behind them, he did not punish them. An entire city was saved because Jonah finally kept his promise to the Lord.



Jonah lay weeping in the sand.



Mary and Joseph looked at the tiny infant.

A King is Born

A baby's cry broke the quiet in the dark stable. There with the sheep and the cows, Mary and Joseph looked in wonder at the tiny infant. What was ahead for this precious child? Would the world know this baby was the Son of God, the Savior of the World?

Mary tucked the infant into a feed box lined with clean straw. Then she rested and thought about all that had happened. She remembered Gabriel, the angel who had brought her God's good news. "Hail, Mary," Gabriel had said. "The Lord is with you. You will have a child and his name shall be

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Jesus. He will be called the Son of the Most High God, and he will rule forever." Mary had been puzzled by this message. She was not even married then. How could she have a child? But Gabriel's words had come true. Here was baby Jesus, sleeping peacefully in the manger.

Joseph got up and checked on their donkey. It had been a long hard trip from Nazareth to Bethlehem. It was the time of the census, when all men traveled back to their birthplace to be counted. Even though Mary's baby was about to be born, she had to go to Bethlehem with her new husband, Joseph. The road had been rough and the donkey's back was so hard for poor Mary. Joseph sighed and looked around at the stable. At least they were in a warm quiet place now. When they had reached Bethlehem, the inns were so crowded, there was no room anywhere for them. Mary had been in great pain. The baby was coming, so Joseph had



It had been a long hard trip to Bethlehem.

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found this spot. Now he wondered. How could God let his Only Son, the King of Heaven, be born in a poor stable?

Suddenly, Joseph heard noises outside. Had someone come to bother Mary and the new baby? A man peered into the stable, then turned to others with him.

"This must be Christ, the Lord, our newborn King! He is sleeping in a manger, just as the angels said!" A group of shepherds carrying torches and lambs crowded into the stable. Quietly, they knelt down beside the baby.

Mary and Joseph listened in amazement as the shepherds told how angels had appeared to them in the sky outside Bethlehem. Later, wise men who had followed a star for thousands of miles also came to worship the newborn King. It was all coming true, everything Gabriel had told Mary and Joseph! God so loved the world, he was sending his Only Son to bring the Light of God to all people everywhere.



"This must be Christ, the Lord."



He was a strange young man, living in a cave.

A Time of Testing

From villages and towns all over Judea, people came to the desert to hear John the Baptist. He was a strange young man, living in a cave, eating insects and honey he had gathered in the wilderness. But love for God shone in his eyes, and his words made people look deep into their own hearts. "Repent," John cried out to them. "Turn away from your sin. The Kingdom of God is coming soon!"

Out in the desert, listening to John preach, many people wanted to change their lives. They wanted to live for God, so they asked John to baptize them in the Jordan River. "I

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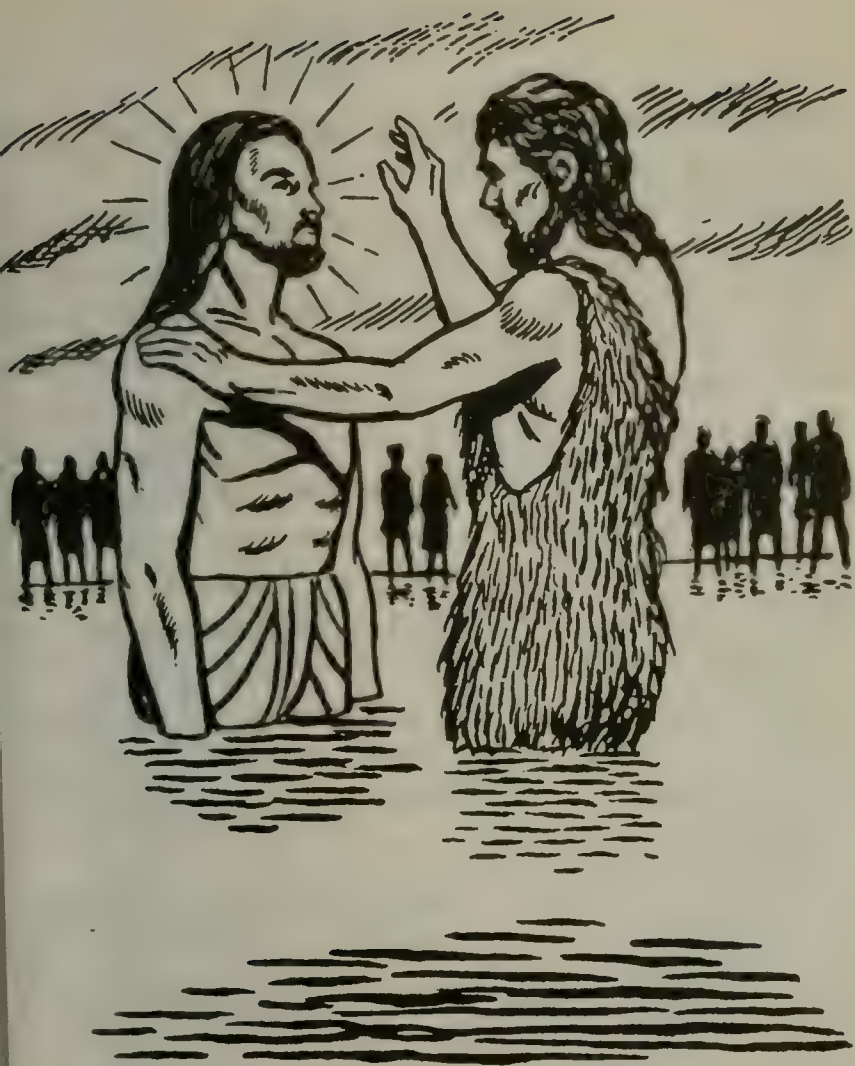
baptize you with water to show that your hearts have changed," John said. "But someone is coming who will baptize with the Holy Spirit."

One day Jesus stepped out of the crowd and went to John who was standing in the river. He asked John to baptize him. "Why do you come to me?" John asked. "I am not worthy to carry your shoes! You should baptize me, Jesus."

Jesus quietly answered, "My Father in heaven has asked me to do this. Will you baptize me, John?"

John turned to the crowd standing along the riverbank. "Behold, the Lamb of God!" John announced. "He will take away the sins of the world." And he baptized Jesus.

When Jesus came up out of the water, a beautiful white light glimmered around his head, like a bird coming to perch on his shoulder. A voice from heaven spoke, "This is my Son and I love him. What he does pleases me."



A white light glimmered around his head.

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People at the river that day were amazed. Who was this Jesus?

After his baptism, Jesus went deeper into the desert, to be alone for a time and to pray to God, his Father. For forty days and forty nights, Jesus prayed, and he ate nothing. His body grew very weak and he felt great pain.

Satan came to the desert to tempt Jesus, to offer him things that would ease his pain. "Oh, Jesus, you say you are the Son of God," Satan teased. "If that is true, turn the stones of this desert into bread. Then you will not be hungry anymore."

Jesus was starving, but he knew he must not listen to Satan. "It takes more than bread to give life, Evil One. A person lives on every word from God."

Next, Satan flew with Jesus to Jerusalem, to the roof of the Temple. They were so high above the ground that the people down below looked like tiny ants. "Jump off this roof and prove that God loves you," Satan



"Turn the stones into bread!"

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said. "If he does, he will send his angels to catch you, so you will not smash on the ground."

Now Jesus knew that his Father loved him. He knew that he had been sent to earth for much more important things than this silly test. "The Scriptures say, 'Do not test God,'" Jesus told Satan.

Finally, Satan took Jesus to the top of a very high mountain. From this peak Jesus could see all the kingdoms of the world and all the great things in those kingdoms. It was a wonderful sight. Satan whispered in Jesus' ear, "Look at the riches and the power down there. I will give it all to you, Jesus. Just bow down and worship me. Forget what God wants you to do. Just serve me, and you can have the world."

Jesus shouted, "Go away, Satan! I will worship only God! I will serve only him! I will do his will!"

Satan's face twisted in great anger. He had



“Go away, Satan! I will worship only God.”

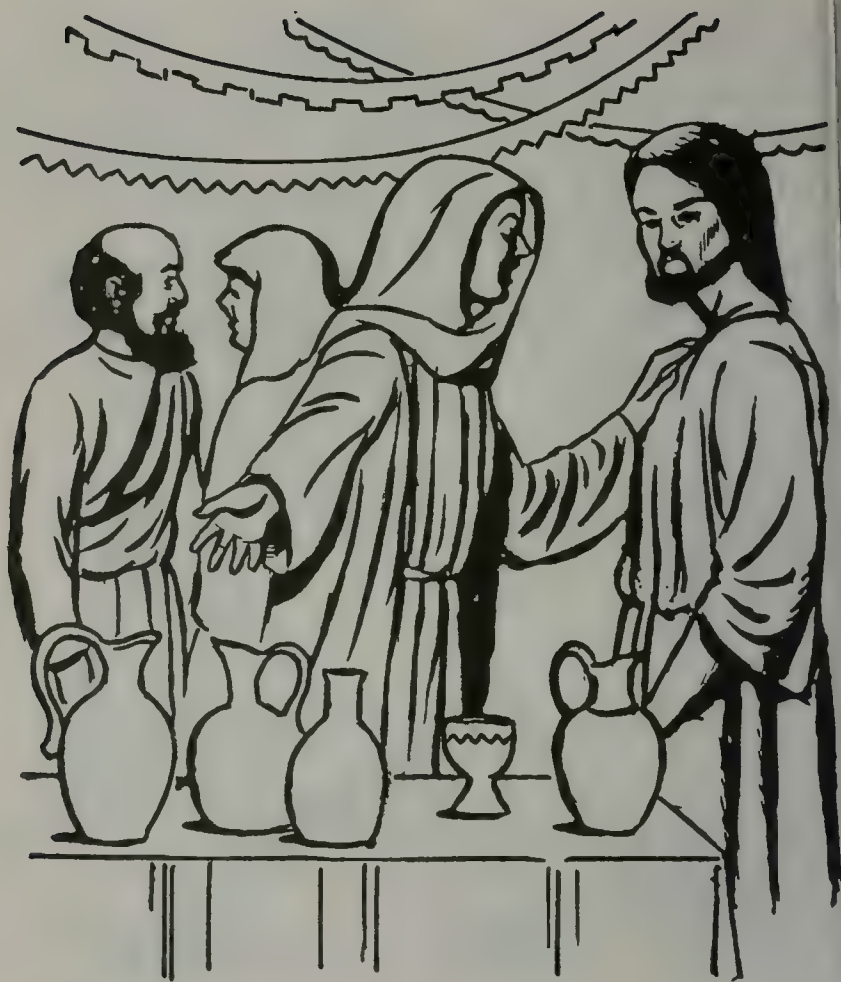
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failed to turn the Son away from the Father. He left Jesus on the mountaintop, too weak from hunger to climb down. Right away, angels came with food for Jesus. They cared for him until he felt strong again.

The time had come to return to his people. He had so much he wanted to tell them about God's love!



Angels came with food for Jesus.



"There is no more wine."

New Wine, New Beginnings

"Oh, what will I do? There is no more wine. Some of the guests have had none. Everyone will know we could not afford to buy enough for the wedding!" The father of the bridegroom looked as if he might cry.

Mary, Jesus' mother, reached out to pat her friend on the shoulder. Times were hard, and almost everyone in the village had money troubles. Still, it was too bad this lovely wedding party had to be spoiled because there was no more wine. Mary looked across the room to where Jesus sat, talking with his new friends. Disciples, he

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called them. Jesus had just spent time alone in the wilderness, and he had a new strong look about him. Could he somehow help the bridegroom's father?

Mary caught her son's eye and crossed the room.

"What is it, Mother?" Jesus asked.

"Son," she whispered, "They have no more wine."

Jesus looked at Mary. Finally he said, "Dear woman, it is not yet time to begin my Father's work." And he walked away.

But Mary knew her son. She knew he would help his friends on this special occasion. So she turned to the servants. "Do whatever he tells you to do."

In the corner were six empty water jars. Jesus said to the servants, "Fill each jar full of water." The jars were very large, and it took many buckets of water from the well to fill them up. At last the job was done.

Then Jesus said to the servants, "Take



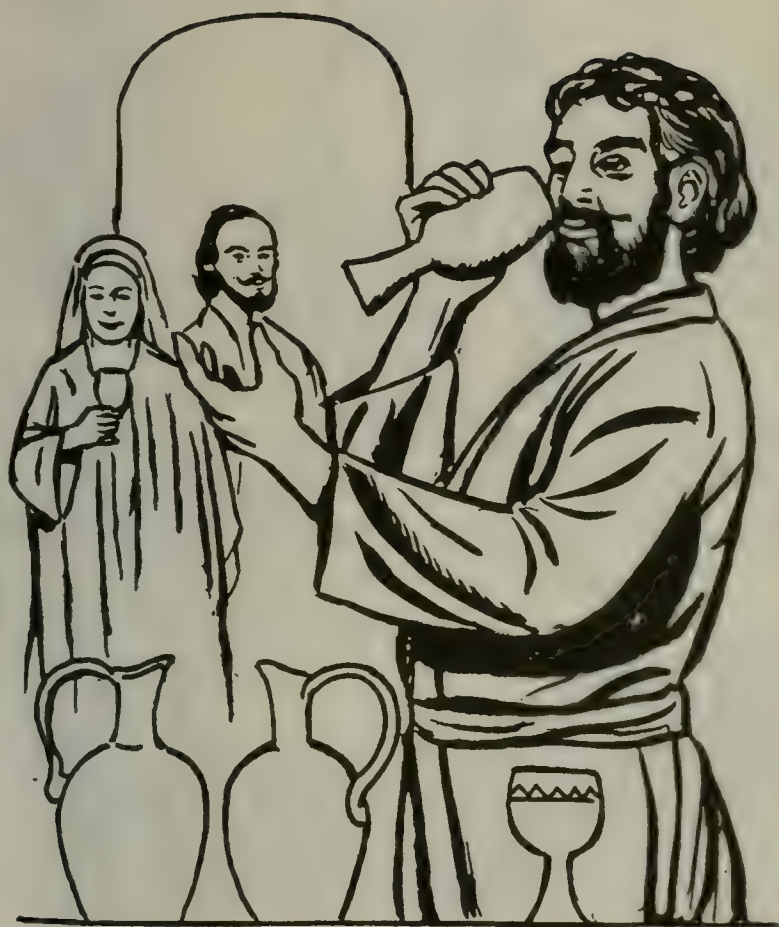
"Fill each jar full of water."

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some water from a jar and give it to the bridegroom's father."

When the father took a sip from the cup, a huge smile crossed his face. He had plenty of wine after all, and it was the best wine he had ever tasted! Only the servants, Mary, and the disciples knew what had happened.

The wedding party went on long into the night. The guests were amazed at the wonderful wine the bridegroom's father served. The bride and the groom began their new life together with much happiness. For Jesus, this first quiet miracle was also a new beginning. His time to do God's work on earth had come.



He had plenty of wine after all.



Lazarus was dead.

Victory over Death

The sound of weeping filled the air. Lazarus was dead. Friends and neighbors gathered to comfort his sisters, Mary and Martha. This house was one of Jesus' favorite places to visit, for he loved Mary and Martha and Lazarus.

When Lazarus had become ill, the sisters had sent a message to their dear friend. They knew Jesus could heal their brother, just as he had healed so many other people. But two days passed and Jesus never came. Helplessly, Mary and Martha watched as Lazarus grew weaker and weaker, and final-

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ly died. They wrapped his body in strips of cloth and placed it in the cave that the village used as a tomb.

Four days passed. Martha heard that Jesus and his disciples were close by. She ran to meet them. "Oh, Jesus," she sobbed. "Lazarus died four days ago! If only you could have come to heal him when we sent for you!"

Jesus looked at his friend with pity and love in his eyes. "Do not weep, Martha. Anyone who believes in me will have life, even if he dies."

Soon, Mary joined her sister and fell at Jesus' feet, weeping. "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died."

Gently, Jesus helped Mary up. "Show me where you buried him."

Together, the three friends walked to the cave where they had placed Lazarus' body. The disciples and the neighbors followed. At the sight of the tomb, the sisters began sobbing again. Jesus, too, felt great sorrow, and he cried with Mary and Martha.



“Show me where you buried him.”

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Then he turned to his disciples, "Move the stone away from the tomb."

"But Lord," Martha said, holding the men back. "It had already been four days. Surely, Lazarus' body will smell bad."

Jesus answered, "Martha, I tell you truly, if you have faith, you will see the glory of God."

Then Jesus looked to heaven. "Father, I thank you that you always hear me. And I thank you that now these people will see and believe that you have sent me."

The door to the tomb was open. In a loud voice, Jesus cried, "Lazarus, come out!"

No one in the crowd around the tomb moved. Could Jesus really bring a dead man back to life? Yes! Lazarus stood at the opening of the cave, the grave cloths still wrapped around his body. He was alive!

When people heard the news of this great miracle, many believed in Jesus. But the elders in Jerusalem were worried. "Jesus has become too powerful. He must die."



He was alive!



A wealthy man had two sons.

The Son Who Came Home Again

Everywhere that Jesus went, he told stories. Most people enjoyed hearing them, but only a few understood that the stories contained great lessons about God. Jesus told the disciples they needed an open heart to hear the truth in his stories.

A wealthy man had two sons. The younger son came to his father and said, "I know that someday when you die, I will get half of all your money. I do not want to wait until then for my share. Father, give me my half now so that I can enjoy spending money while I am still a young man."

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The father granted his younger son's request. The son packed up all his belongings and moved to another country far from his home. He lived an exciting life, giving parties for his new friends, wearing fine clothes, and buying anything that he wanted. But before long, every bit of the money that his father had given him was gone.

Soon afterwards, a time of very dry weather came to the country where the younger son lived. Weeks went by and no rain fell. People who had food kept it for themselves. They would not sell it, except at a very high price. The younger son had no money to buy food, and his new friends left him. He was hungry, so he looked for work. The only job he found was feeding pigs for a farmer. It was hot messy work, not at all what the son enjoyed doing. But he was so hungry, he was willing to eat the scraps of food that the farmer put out for the pigs. No one gave him anything.



The only job he found was feeding pigs.

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After several nights of going to bed on an empty stomach, the son thought to himself, "I have been very foolish to spend all my money having fun. I am here almost dying with hunger, while the servants at my father's house have plenty to eat. I will now go home to my father and ask to be a servant."

So that is what happened. The son returned to his own country. While he was still a long way from his father's house, his father saw him and ran out to greet him. As his father hugged and kissed him, the son said, "Father, I am not good enough to be treated like this. I was wrong to spend all your money. Let me be your servant."

But the father would not listen. He called to his servants, "Hurry! Bring the finest robe in the house, and a jewelled ring and sandals! My son is alive and has come home again! Prepare a feast so that we can celebrate!"

The older son was out working in the field when sounds of dancing reached his ears.



His father saw him and ran out to greet him.

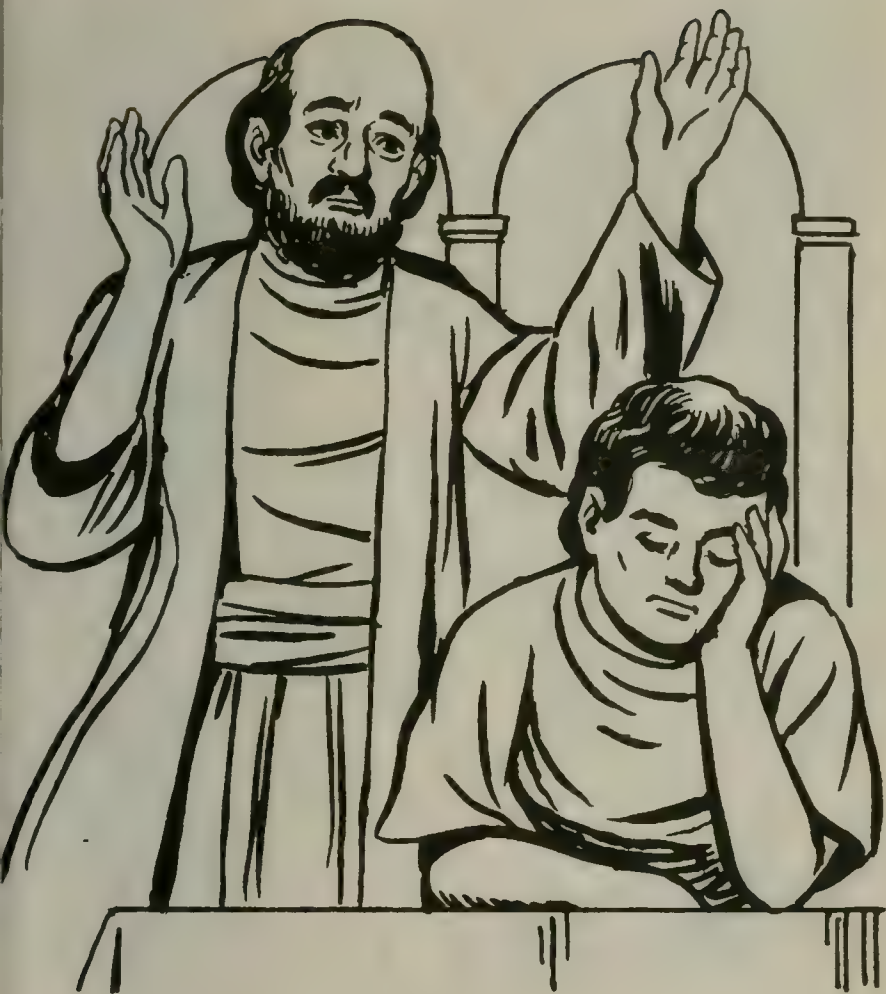
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"What is happening?" he asked one of the workers. The worker told him that his younger brother had come home and their father was celebrating. The older son grew very angry when he heard this, and would not go up to the house to see his brother. His father walked out to the field and begged him to come, but still the older son refused.

"Father, I have worked hard for you many years. I have always done whatever you asked of me. Not once did you give a feast in my honor. My brother runs off and spends your money on wild parties and fancy clothes. Then he comes home and you celebrate!"

"Son, son," the father sighed. "I am glad that you have always been here with me. Everything that I have is yours. But we have to celebrate today because your brother was lost to us and now he is found. He was dead, but now he is alive!"

Jesus told this story to show his followers how God wants us to come home to him, no



“He was dead, but now he is alive!”

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matter what we have done. Like the father in this story, God is happy to welcome back a son who has made a mistake. Jesus also wanted us to see that sometimes good people act like the older brother. They should celebrate when a person like the younger son turns away from his wrong-doing.



Jesus told stories to his followers.



"Come to the hillside this afternoon."

Teachings from the Hillside

All over Galilee, people were talking about Jesus.

"Have you heard the new Teacher? He speaks about heaven as if he had been there!"

"My son saw him heal a blind man!"

"This Jesus is different from other teachers of the Law. I could listen to him all day!"

In the marketplace, at the well, over the dinner table, the name Jesus was on everyone's lips.

One day, the disciples went around to all the villages. "Come to the hillside this after-

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noon," they announced. "The Master will speak to us there." Families packed baskets of food, shopkeepers closed their doors, sick people begged friends to help them up the hill. Everyone wanted to hear Jesus!

It was beautiful and very cool up on the hillside. Birds sang and wild flowers nodded in the breeze. Children played in the grass while their parents sat and talked with neighbors, waiting for Jesus. At last, he and his disciples arrived. As they walked through the crowd to the top of the hill, Jesus' heart overflowed with love for these people. So much of God's beauty bloomed around them, and yet all they saw were their own cares and worries. What should he tell them?

"My brothers and sisters," Jesus said. "Be happy, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to you. If you are sad, God will comfort you. When you try hard to do what is right, God will fill you with happiness. When you work for peace, God calls you his children. If you



At last, Jesus and his disciples arrived.

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are treated badly for doing good, God will give you the kingdom of heaven. So rejoice and be happy in the Lord."

The clouds overhead shifted in the sky and a bright patch of sunlight shone on the grass beside Jesus. "Do you see this sunlight?" Jesus asked the people. "You are like this. You are the light for other people. A mother does not hide her candle under a bowl. She sets it up so everyone in the house can see. Live so other people can see the good things you do. When they see your good light, they will praise God."

The sudden sound of two little boys fighting in the crowd stopped Jesus. He walked over to the boys and gently pulled them apart. "My sons," he said with a smile, "God does not want us to pay back one bad deed with another one. If someone slaps your cheek, turn the other cheek instead of hitting back. This way, we will live in peace with one another."

Jesus sent the boys back to their parents



Two little boys were fighting.

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and continued. "Most of us love our neighbors. We know how to be kind to people who are kind to us. But I tell you, love your enemies. Pray for those who hurt you. Then you truly will be children of your Father in heaven."

People in the crowd looked at one another in amazement. Jesus used such simple things to show God's will, like sunlight, or boys fighting. It was so plain and clear to understand!

An older man spoke up, "Teacher, I am a poor man. I did not go to school, so I cannot say fancy words when I pray. Can you teach someone like me to pray?"

"God does not want fancy words," Jesus answered. "God knows the things you need even before you ask for them. Pray like this: Father in heaven, we will keep your name holy. We want to be part of your kingdom. Let your will be done here on earth like it is in heaven. Give us the food we need today.



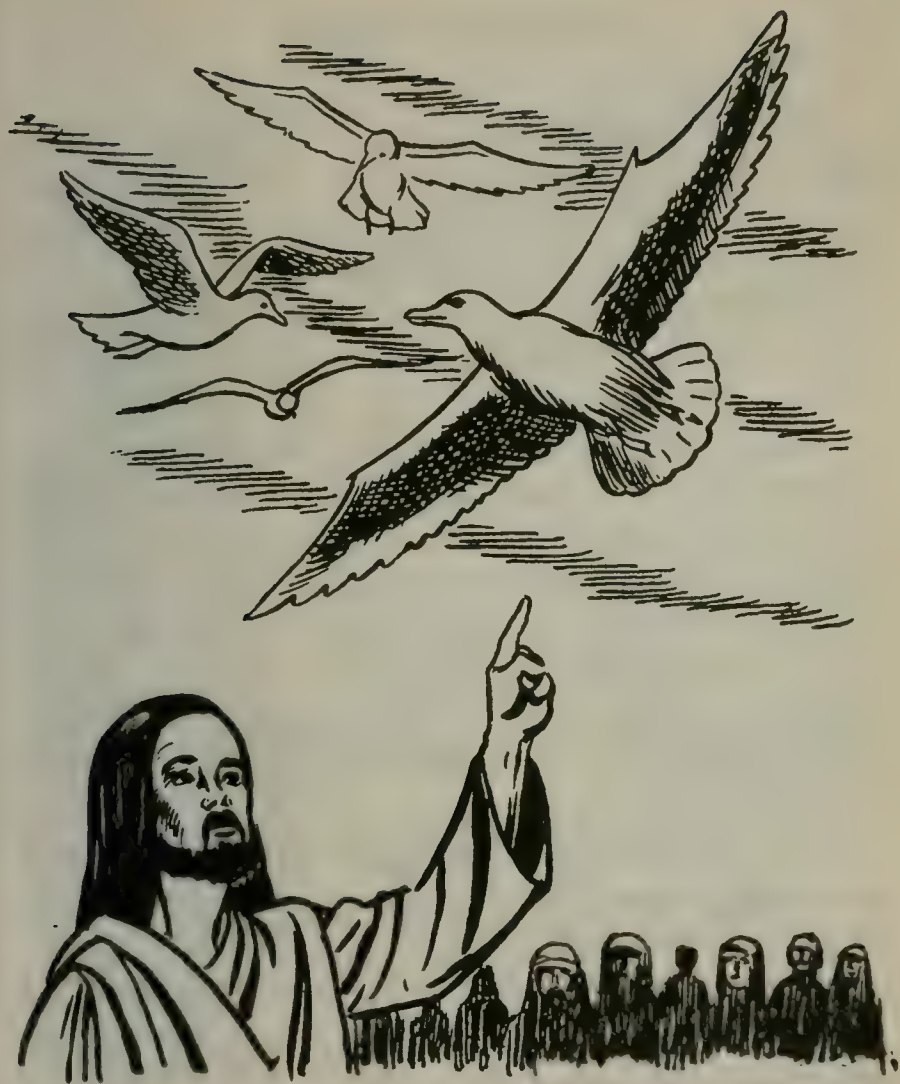
Jesus used simple words.

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Forgive us for our wrong-doings. Do not cause us to be tested, and save us from evil."

A man sat in the grass playing with the money bag tied to his belt. "Do not save up treasure here on earth," Jesus said to the man. "A thief can break into your house and steal your treasure. Instead, store your treasure in heaven. Put value on the things that money cannot buy, like loving God and helping other people. Do not worry about what you will eat or what you will wear." Jesus stopped a moment to watch some birds flying overhead. "Look at the birds. They do not plant grain or harvest it, but God feeds them just the same. And look at those lovely lilies in the field. Even a king cannot dress as grandly as they do! If God gives the lilies beautiful petals to wear, surely he will take care of you."

Jesus looked around at all the people sitting on the hillside. Did they understand his message? Did they know how much God loved each one of them?



“Look at the birds.”

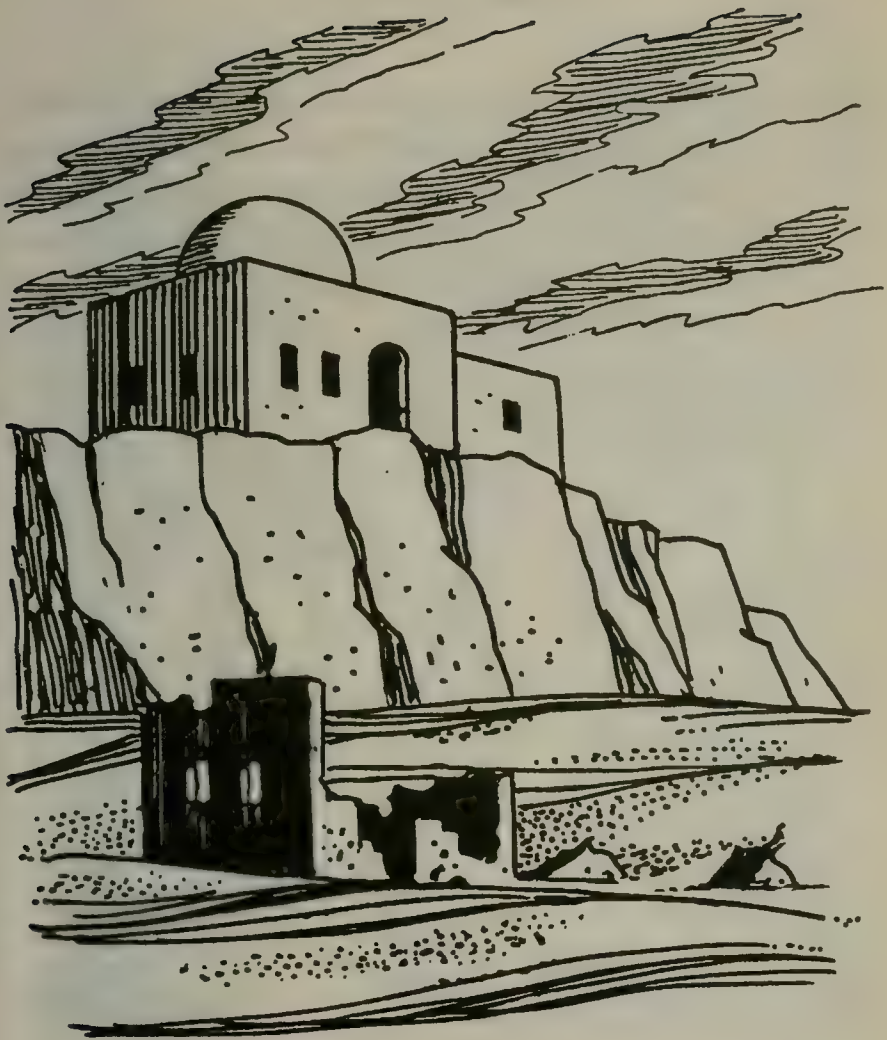
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"How many of you are fathers?" Jesus asked the men. "If your son asked for bread to eat, would you give him a stone? Of course not. You know how to give good things to your son. Your heavenly Father is the same way. He knows how to give good things to those who ask him."

Jesus continued. "Fathers, would you build houses for your families on rock or on sand? A wise man builds on the rock, for when the rains come, the house will stand firm. Everyone who hears my words and obeys them is like that wise man. His house will not fall in the storm. But the foolish man builds on the sand. The first rain that comes knocks the house down.

The person who hears my words but does not obey them is like a man with a house built in the sand.

Drops of rain began to fall, and the people looked around in surprise. They had been listening to Jesus so intently, they had not



"A wise man builds on a rock."

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noticed the dark clouds gathering in the sky. Some picked up their mats and baskets to go home, but many followed Jesus and the disciples down the hill to the house where they would spend the night. Some wanted a touch from Jesus' healing hands, others wanted to hear more from this Teacher who opened their hearts to God's love.



Many followed Jesus down the mountain.



Were they able to carry on God's work?

The Last Supper

Candlelight flickered in the upper room where the disciples ate and talked quietly. Jesus looked from face to face. How he loved these men! For almost three years they had traveled with him throughout the countryside, teaching people about God's love. Now they had come to Jerusalem, to celebrate the feast of the Passover and to worship at the Temple. Jesus sighed. Did these men understand anything ahead of them? Were they strong enough to carry on God's work?

Jesus picked up a loaf of bread and gave thanks for it. He spoke quietly and the dis-

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ciples leaned forward to listen. "This bread is like my body. It will be broken for you."

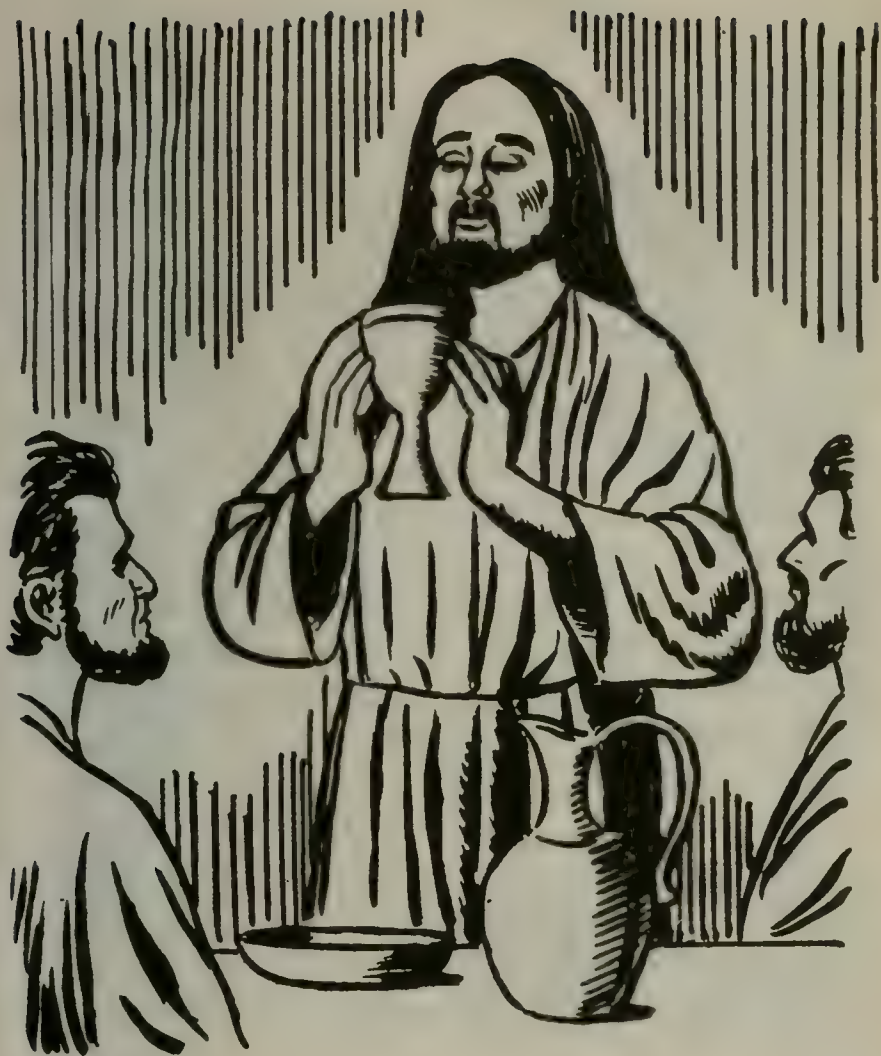
Jesus tore the bread in half and handed it to the disciples. "Take this and eat it. In days to come, break bread among yourselves to remember me."

The disciples looked puzzled as they pulled off chunks of bread. What was Jesus talking about, breaking his body? And how could they ever forget him, this Master they loved so much?

Next, Jesus poured a cup of wine. He held it up before them. "This wine is like my blood. My blood will be spilled for the sins of the world. Drink of it, all of you."

He watched the disciples drink silently. Then Jesus said, "My children, I can be with you only a little while longer. And now I give you a new commandment, to love one another as I have loved you. Everyone will know you are my followers if you love each other."

Peter was worried. "Lord, where are you



"This is my blood."

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going? What will happen to you? I want to go, too. I will follow you, no matter what!"

Jesus smiled at this rough, strong disciple, "Peter, Peter, where I am going now, you cannot follow. I go to prepare a place for you, and then I will come back. For a time you will be sad, but your sadness will turn to joy."

Jesus said these things so that his followers would begin to understand about his death and the resurrection. After a time of prayer, the men left the table. Some of the disciples went on with Jesus to a quiet garden. Others prepared for bed. But one man, Judas, went to the elders of Jerusalem and told them where they could find his master.

The end was coming.



Judas betrayed his master.



“Crucify him! Kill Jesus!”

He's Alive!

"Crucify him! Kill Jesus on a cross!" the people of Jerusalem screamed. "He claims to be the Son of God. Our Law says he must die!"

Pilate, the Roman ruler, sadly nodded to his soldiers. He knew Jesus had done nothing wrong. But he did not want to make the people angry. The soldiers whipped Jesus with a leather strap tipped in metal. Blood poured down his back, but he never cried out. Next, the soldiers rammed a crown of thorns on his head. "Hail, King of the Jews!" they laughed. Finally, they ordered Jesus to

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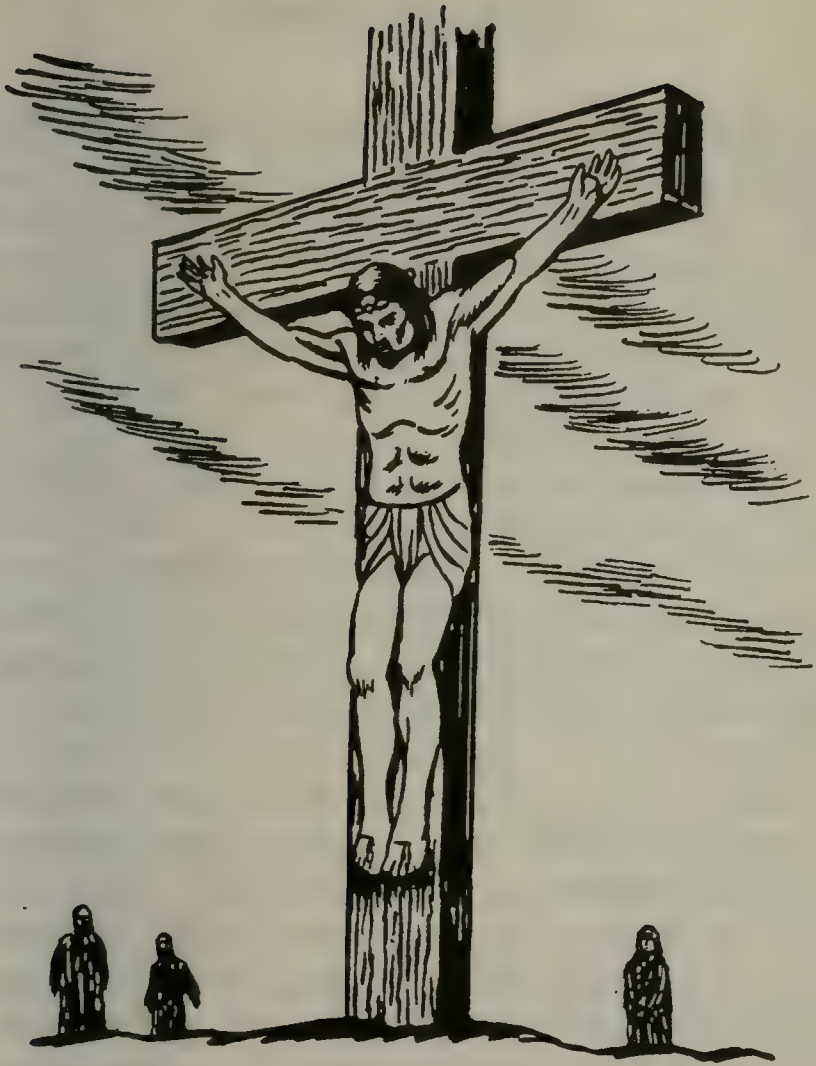
pick up the heavy wooden cross and carry it out of the city.

As Jesus staggered by, the people grew silent. Just one week ago, they had cheered this man. They had hoped he would be their new king and free Israel from the Roman rulers. Only a few people understood that Jesus came to be a different kind of king, the King of Heaven and Earth.

On a hill outside Jerusalem, soldiers nailed Jesus' feet and hands to the cross and raised it up. For hours, Jesus hung there, suffering in the hot sun. "If you are God's Son, save yourself!" someone in the crowd teased.

Jesus looked to the sky. "Father," he groaned, "Forgive them. They do not know what they are doing."

By late afternoon, black clouds had gathered and thunder rumbled. Jesus suddenly cried out in a loud voice, "It is finished! Father, I give you my spirit!" The earth shook and darkness filled the sky. Jesus was dead.



“Forgive them father!”

BIBLE STORIES

Three days later, some women who had loved Jesus went to his tomb to wash his body and wrap it in grave cloths. There had been no time to do this on the day he died.

"What will we do?" one woman asked the others. "We have forgotten about the heavy stone over the door of the tomb. We cannot move it ourselves."

"Perhaps the guards posted there will help us," answered her friend.

But when the women reached the tomb, they were amazed. The guards were gone and the stone had been rolled away. Jesus' tomb was open, and a bright light shone all around.

"Oh, sisters! Someone has stolen Jesus' body! How could anyone do such a terrible thing!" cried one of the women.

Suddenly, a voice spoke out of the bright light. "Are you looking for Jesus? He is not here. He has risen from death, just as he promised. Go, tell the others!"

BIBLE STORIES

That night, the disciples gathered in a secret room. They were afraid the elders would punish them for following Jesus. The women had told them that morning about finding the empty tomb, but the men did not believe their story. One disciple said, "I will not believe Jesus is alive unless I can touch the nail holes in his hands."

Then, standing there before them, was Jesus! "Peace be with you! I am alive. Touch me and believe!"

The men looked at one another and then back at Jesus. He was alive! Jesus had come back to life, just as he said he would! They laughed and cried and hugged and laughed some more. He was alive!

Jesus and his followers talked long into the night. The disciples had many questions for their Lord, and he opened their minds so they could understand God's plans.

"I had to die for the sins of the world," Jesus said. "And now I go to be with the

BIBLE STORIES

Father. But I leave you with a task and a promise. Go tell people everywhere what I have taught you, and my Spirit will be with you always, even until the end of the world."

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